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SOPRANOS OF TODAY



Maria Meneghini Callas as *Norma*

Roger W

SOPRANOS OF TODAY

STUDIES OF TWENTY-FIVE
OPERA SINGERS

by
Harold Rosenthal



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*TO THE
SOPRANO
VOICE*

INTRODUCTION

Choosing twenty-five sopranos of to-day to write about was no easy task (I can think of at least twice that number who are worthy of inclusion in these pages), so I decided to turn these studies into something more personal: to write about twenty-five artists who have given me particular pleasure in my opera-going, to choose those whose singing and whose voices I admire, but also, in many cases, singers who are known to me personally and whom I count among my personal friends. The fact that this book includes two artists who have now retired from the operatic stage—Joan Cross and Kirsten Flagstad—is explained by the fact that their singing has afforded me many hours of enjoyment, and that their influence is still felt in the world of opera.

A music critic is supposed to be impartial, but I do not think that is possible, and I openly admit that I have certain preferences among contemporary singers. One of the great pleasures of opera-going is to hear one's favourite singers in different rôles, and to compare their performances and interpretations with those of other artists. The fact that some of the sopranos about whom I am writing in this book are known to me personally does not blind me to such weaknesses and mannerisms as exist in their art. In the same way I am quite ready to believe that my own opinions may be irrational and not readily accepted by other people, so I have tried not to be too dogmatic in what I say. I assume that since all those who read this book must share with me my love of the human voice, they will probably agree that the soprano voice, for which so many composers have written some of their most beautiful melodies, is one of the most ravishing of all sounds.

H. D. R.

VICTORIA DE LOS ANGELES

SPAIN has given us many great opera singers during the last hundred years or so; Patti, Galli-Curci, Conchita Supervia are names that every opera-goer knows, and in our time Victoria de los Angeles has quickly taken her place among the great singers of the post-war generation.

Spanish singers generally mature very early, and often make their débuts in their teens. De los Angeles was no exception, for her first public appearance was made in a performance of Monteverdi's *Orfeo* when she was only 18. True, she was still studying at the Barcelona Conservatory, but even at that early age she displayed a vocal quality and emotional power rare in one so young.

She was born in 1924 in Barcelona. Her father was an employee of the University, and she lived with her family in a house attached to it. When still a child, she discovered that she could sing, and used to accompany herself on a guitar. University lectures were interrupted by the young de los Angeles, who would break into a class-room in order to try out its acoustics! Her formal education was carried out at a school attached to the University. One day a professor who had heard her singing suggested that she should go to the Conservatory and study singing seriously. As in many cases of budding singers, her father forbade her even to think of a musical career, so she did what many other aspiring opera artists have done—studied secretly. When she was accepted by the head of the Conservatory she finally had to break the news to her father, and as her own mother had been similarly forbidden by her parents to take up a professional singing career, mother and daughter soon overcame the male opposition in the family.

The singing course at the Conservatory normally took six years; de los Angeles completed it in three, obtaining every prize. On one occasion when her professor was unable to take a class because of illness, he gave the young singer the task, saying: "You know much more about it than I do".

After her appearance in Monteverdi's *Orfeo*, mentioned earlier, two more years of musical study followed. Then in May, 1944, she gave her first public concert. This was a lieder recital in Barcelona. A few days later she was heard in Mozart's *Coronation Mass*, and then in a series of concerts and lieder recitals in other cities. Her professional operatic début took place at the Teatro Liceo in Barcelona as the Countess in *Figaro* in January, 1945. Then followed appearances in Portugal and a return once more to Barcelona, where during the next two opera seasons she sang Manon and Marguerite in French, Mimì in Italian, and Elisabeth in *Tannhäuser* in German. In 1947 she participated in the International Festival at Geneva, and out of a hundred competitors she gained the first prize. A year or two elapsed,

however, before her fame spread outside Spain and Portugal. It was in 1948 that the BBC invited her to come to London to sing in a broadcast of Falla's *La Vida Breve*. Such was her success that even Ernest Newman was moved to write an enthusiastic notice about her in "The Sunday Times". She returned to London the following year to sing at the Wigmore Hall, and in February, 1950, made her Covent Garden début as Mimì. This was one of those occasions in one's opera-going experience that will not be forgotten. A packed house, an audience containing nearly every singer one knew, active and retired, had come to hear this new "Spanish nightingale". Her success was never for a moment in doubt. Covent Garden heard her again in 1951 as Mimì, Manon, Elsa and Cio-Cio-San. Her interpretation of the "child bride" in Puccini's opera was one of the most moving and beautifully sung interpretations in my opera-going experience. I recollect writing at the time: "Even the critics were seen to applaud, while seasoned opera-goers were heard muttering 'not since Destin . . .'"

Since then de los Angeles's operatic appearances have been confined mostly to the Metropolitan Opera in New York, with an occasional visit to Milan and Buenos Aires. Germany heard her first in the autumn of 1955, when she appeared at Stuttgart in *La Bohème*, and *Madama Butterfly*. There has been much discussion among musicians as to whether this singer is really a soprano, or merely a very high mezzo-soprano. It should be remembered that although to-day mezzo-sopranos generally sing rôles like Carmen and Amneris, it was not very long ago that they were also heard in rôles that lay rather higher. The first Octavian for example, Eva van der Osten, was one of these high mezzos, and as well as singing Venus, Ortrud and Kundry, she was also heard as Isolde, Tatiana and Tosca.

One would have thought that de los Angeles's voice and technique made her peculiarly suited to those rôles that Rossini wrote with his wife, Isabella Colbran (also a Spaniard), in mind; parts like Rosina, Isabella in *L'Italiana in Algeri* and Angelina in *La Cenerentola*. Her temperament is not, however, particularly suited to these light-hearted parts on the stage, though off-stage she is gay enough. Like so many of to-day's singers, she has remained quite unspoilt by her successes, and still strikes one as a simple Spanish girl at heart, whom nature has blessed with a most beautiful voice.

RECORDINGS

Victoria de los Angeles has taken part in a number of recordings of complete operas, including *Pagliacci*, *Faust*, *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, *La Vida Breve* and *Madama Butterfly*. It is in these last two works that she is at her best; the Falla (HMV ALP 1150-51 and Victor LM 6017) shows her on her native heath so to speak; while as Cio-Cio-San (HMV ALP 1215-17 and Victor LM 6121) she gives one of the most beautifully sung and moving interpretations of the rôle one could hope to hear. Also strongly recommended is her operatic recital on HMV ALP 1284 in which the beauty and simplicity with which she sings Desdemona's "Salce" and "Ave Maria" would move a stone to tears; these alone are worth the price of a disc that contains many other delectable things as well.

INGE BORKH

THE GERMAN APPROACH TO ART being far more serious and thorough than elsewhere, it is hardly surprising that so many operatic artists who receive their training in Germany are as fine actors as they are singers. Indeed the careers of a number of outstanding German operatic personalities began, if not on the legitimate stage, at least with it in mind. Inge Borkh, for example, is a product of the Max Reinhardt School. She was born in Mannheim in May, 1921, and in 1936 went to Vienna to study at the Reinhardt Seminary, which was attached to the Burgtheater. Only then did she discover that she had a natural singing voice, and she was advised to go to Italy to study.

After a period of vocal and musical study in Florence, Milan and at the Mozarteum in Salzburg, she was engaged by the Stadttheater in Lucerne, where she made her début in 1940 as Agathe in *Der Freischütz*. All the war years were spent in Switzerland, and her engagement at Lucerne was followed by appearances at Berne, Basle and Zurich. Her rôles at this time included Leonore (*Fidelio*), Aida, and Marie in *Wozzeck*,

In 1951 her performance as Magda Sorel in the first performance in German of *The Consul* at Basle created a sensation. This was a rôle which suited Inge Borkh's temperament and natural dramatic instinct, and it was not very long before the news of her success had spread into Germany, and brought her an invitation to sing as a guest artist at the Munich Opera, where her first performances were in the rôles of Salome, and Senta in *Der fliegende Holländer*. Munich, with its Richard Strauss tradition and history of great performers in the title rôle of Salome, quickly surrendered to this new young interpreter of the part of the Princess of Judæa.

At the Berlin Städtische Oper Inge Borkh's name soon appeared on the programmes, and to the parts she had already sung with success in Switzerland and Munich she added the title rôles of *Tosca*, *Mona Lisa* by Schillings and *Elektra*. In the summer of 1952 she sang Freia and Sieglinde at Bayreuth. Her vocal performances in these two operas were of a high order, but the Reinhardt-trained young actress found it very difficult to adapt her dramatic talents to the new Wagner production techniques. A few weeks after the Bayreuth Festival was over, Inge Borkh made her British début at the Edinburgh Festival, singing Leonore as a guest artist with the Hamburg ensemble.

A year later she was engaged by the San Francisco Opera, and made her American début as Elektra, following this with the title rôle of *Turandot*. She has returned to San Francisco for the last two seasons, and recently had a sensational success as Lady Macbeth in Verdi's opera, which was having its first American performance for close on a century.

It is not often that a German-born artist appears in the Italian opera houses in operas other than those by German composers, but Inge Borkh has virtually made her own the title part in Respighi's *La Fiamma*, which she has sung at La Scala, Milan, and the Rome Opera. At the Florence Festival in 1954 she appeared as Eglantine in Weber's rarely performed *Euryanthe*, and at the Salzburg Festival in 1955 she created the part of Cathleen in Werner Egk's *Irische Legende*.

This artist's singing and acting of Elektra with the Stuttgart company in London in the autumn of 1955 divided the critics, both professional and amateur. Some thought that her lightish, Italianate voice would have been more suited to the part of Chrysothemis; others found her visually too mannered; but all agreed that rarely could the part have been sung with so pure a tone and by an artist who even at the end of that gruelling piece sounded as fresh as she did when the curtain rose.

Borkh is not attached permanently to any opera company, though she does spend a great deal of her time at Stuttgart, where her husband, Alexander Welitsch, is one of the leading baritones. It must indeed be a very odd experience to sing the parts of John the Baptist in *Salome* and Orest in *Elektra* opposite one's own wife.

RECORDINGS

Other than a recording of Magda's aria from *The Consul* on HMV DB 11537 (available in Europe), the only discs made by Inge Borkh are those comprising the complete *Turandot*, on Decca LXT 5128-30 and London XLLA 36. This is a very good, musical performance, without quite reaching the exciting heights of a Turandot like Eva Turner.

GRÉ BROUWENSTIJN

HOLLAND, rather like the U.S.A. and Great Britain, has no native operatic tradition, and it is only in the last ten years or so that a Dutch National Opera has been established. Like Britain too, Dutch singers in the past have been more renowned as lieder and oratorio artists. There were of course exceptions, and singers like Elisabeth Ohms, Jacques Urlus and Anton van Rooy had world-wide reputations as Wagnerian singers earlier this century. With the establishment of a national opera, Holland is producing singers, a number of whom are already taking their places on the opera stages of the world. Such an artist is Gré Brouwenstijn.

She was born in Den Helder in North Holland in August, 1915, and started to take singing lessons when she was sixteen, attending classes at the Amsterdam Musik Lyceum. Her singing career started with appearances with the Dutch Broadcasting Company, and I still have vivid recollections of being most impressed by a young Dutch soprano I heard singing Verdi excerpts in a radio concert from Hilversum shortly after the end of the war. I made some enquiries in Amsterdam and was told that the singer I had heard was Gré Brouwenstijn, "one of the most promising of our native artists". In 1946 the Nederlandsche Opera was founded, and shortly after Gré Brouwenstijn joined the company. Her first leading part was Tosca in 1947, followed by Santuzza. Her rôles with the company have included Elizabeth de Valois (*Don Carlos*), Leonora (*Trovatore*), Rezia (*Oberon*), the title rôle in *Jenufa*, the Countess (*Figaro*) and Tatiana (*Eugene Onegin*).

This singer's first appearances outside Holland were in Dublin, where she sang Tosca and Leonora in 1950. The BBC was quick to recognise the potentialities of this talented young artist, and invited her to sing Jaroslavna (*Prince Igor*) and the title rôles in *Iphigénie en Aulide*, *Rusalka* and *Jenufa*. She made her Covent Garden début as Aida under Barbirolli in October, 1951, and during the same season she was also heard as Leonora in *Il Trovatore*. She has been a constant visitor to London ever since, and her Amelia in Rennert's production of *Un Ballo in Maschera* will be gratefully remembered by many opera-goers.

Brouwenstijn's sincere approach to music and her dramatic ability attracted the attention of Wieland Wagner at Bayreuth. She was asked by him to sing Elisabeth (*Tannhäuser*) in the 1954 Festival, and has reappeared there in 1955 and 1956 as Sieglinde, Gutrune, and Eva. So quickly did she adapt herself to the new production methods of Wieland Wagner, that when he was asked by the Stuttgart Opera to produce *Fidelio*, he insisted that Brouwenstijn should sing the rôle of Leonore. His highly controversial production of *Fidelio* has also been seen in Paris and London and in both cities the Dutch artist scored a great personal success.

The performances of *Rusalka* and *Jenufa* that Brouwenstijn sang for the BBC were conducted by Rafael Kubelik, and conductor and singer developed a mutual admiration for each other's work. It was therefore appropriate that she was chosen to sing the part of Desdemona in the production of *Otello* at Covent Garden in October, 1955, which marked the beginning of Kubelik's régime as Musical Director of that theatre. Vocally Brouwenstijn may not have that Italian warmth which opera-goers in Latin countries expect from a Verdi soprano, but on the other hand she does possess a musicality and a graceful stage presence which many Latin singers might well envy. In addition she possesses great sincerity, and this is an attribute that British audiences especially appreciate in operatic singers.

Off the stage she is completely unspoilt, and spends much of her time with her small son. She enjoys the company of the many friends she has made throughout Europe, and unlike many artists she is only too eager to listen to criticism of her performances, and even invites it from those of her acquaintances whom she knows will tell her the truth.

RECORDINGS

So far only one of Gré Brouwenstijn's recordings is available in Great Britain—the excerpts from *Un Ballo in Maschera* with the Dutch tenor Frans Vroons (Philips NBR 6023, shortly to be issued in America under an Epic number)—which gives a very good idea of this artist's Verdi style, though another will shortly be available, which includes Santuzza's "Voi lo sapete, o Mamma" from *Cavalleria Rusticana*. Available abroad are a whole host of titles, including a complete Verdi *Requiem*, with Maria von Ilosvay, Petre Munteanu, Oskar Czerwenka and the St. Cecilia Orchestra under Paul van Kempen, arias from *Oberon*, *Otello*, *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* and Beethoven's "Ah perfido".

MARIA MENEGHINI CALLAS

THERE IS CURRENT in operatic circles the widely-held belief that the day of the star singer is over. Emphasis in the opera house is placed on production and ensemble, and while not willing to deny the value these contribute to opera, I am either naïve or old-fashioned enough to believe that without stars opera cannot prosper. One has only to remember that many of the great operatic masterpieces were composed with specific singers in mind: Bellini wrote *Norma* for Pasta, Donizetti his *Don Pasquale* for Grisi and Mario, and Verdi his *Otello* for Tamagno.

After the war years, during which English-speaking audiences were cut off from the Continental opera scene, one was only too eager to seek new operatic experiences abroad, and so every new voice that came out of Italy was listened to with great interest, in the hope that here at last was a "star" in the true sense of the word. It was in 1947 that the name of Maria Callas first appeared on an Italian operatic programme. This was at the Verona Arena, where she was heard in the title rôle of Ponchielli's *La Gioconda*. Her success was great, and from then onwards Callas has never looked back.

She was born of Greek parents in New York in December, 1923, and it was in America that she spent her childhood. She went to Greece when she was 13 and received her musical training at the Athens Conservatory, where her teacher was Elvira de Hildago, a Spanish coloratura soprano, who had sung at the Scala, the Metropolitan and at Covent Garden in the 1920s, strangely enough with the British National Opera Company.

Callas's début was made at the Athens Opera in the part of Martha in d'Albert's *Tiefland*, and she also sang Fiammetta in Suppé's *Boccaccio*. In 1945 she returned to America and in 1947 was heard by the famous tenor Zenatello, who recommended her to the Arena of Verona, where he had originated the open-air opera seasons as far back as 1913. The conductor of that *Gioconda* performance was Tullio Serafin, who saw the immense potentialities of Callas, and it was with that great conductor that she studied many of her now famous rôles. Serafin took the young soprano to Venice for the 1947—48 season, where she sang Isolde and Turandot. This latter rôle she repeated at Verona the following summer, and it was there that she met Signor Meneghini, a wealthy Italian industrialist, whom she married.

The turning point in her career came during the 1948—49 season at the Fenice Theatre in Venice, where she had been engaged to sing Brünnhilde in *Die Walküre*. The next opera due for production was Bellini's *I Puritani* with Margherita Carosio as Elvira. Carosio fell ill, and Serafin suggested that Callas should sing the rôle. It was unbelievable that an Isolde, Turandot and Brünnhilde should sing the "delicate"

part of Elvira, but Callas did; and she triumphed. For the first time for many years there was a dramatic soprano capable of singing florid rôles. And why not? After all Lilli Lehmann sang Constanze, the Queen of the Night, Norma, Violetta, Brünnhilde and Isolde! A week after the Venice *Puritani*, Callas was off to Rome to sing Kundry in *Parsifal*.

After the success of *Puritani*, Callas gradually gave up her heavier rôles and concentrated on the Rossini—Bellini—Donizetti repertory. Operas not heard in Italy for more than a century were revived especially for her; works like Rossini's *Armida* and *Il Turco in Italia*; Cherubini's *Medea* and Spontini's *La Vestale*. In addition she undertook rôles like Lucia and Adina in *La Sonnambula*, which had probably not been sung by a dramatic coloratura since the days of Pasta and Grisi.

It is impossible in so short an appreciation of this artist to list all her repertory and to give full details of all the opera houses in which she has sung, but it is safe to make a generalization and say that there is not a major opera house in the world which has not heard Callas.

I suggested that Callas was a "star" personality; in other words she is a *prima donna* in the true sense of the term. She possesses the authority and dignity on the stage that one associates with the great singers of the past. Off-stage she has a great sense of humour, and is very forthright in her views. Neither conductors, producers nor colleagues are immune from her outspoken criticisms.

She is a great believer in tradition and studies her scores with a thoroughness that puts to shame many of her contemporaries. Even if one does not agree with the way in which she interprets a rôle, she has her own good reasons for so doing, which she will explain at great length. Her acting is majestic and passionate in turn. Those who have witnessed her last act of *Norma* will probably agree that if she did not sing a note she would rank as a great dramatic actress. In addition she is able to act with her voice and is perhaps the only present-day singer who can use coloratura dramatically.

Of course she has her detractors: what great artist has not? "The voice is ugly", "She has three voices", are criticisms that one often hears and indeed even her greatest admirer would admit that there is some truth in these statements. But to answer her critics I would say that the innate beauty of the voice is such as can move listeners to tears in certain passages, and that her dramatic ability enables her to recreate an operatic character in such a way that the listener feels he is hearing it for the very first time. She is one of the truly greatest of present-day operatic artists, and, I would even venture to say, one of the finest singing actresses in operatic history.

RECORDINGS

When it comes to have to make a choice from among the many Callas recordings, one is up against something of a problem. In the first place, critical opinion is so divided over the merits and demerits of the singer's individual performances, and



Victoria
de los Angeles

Derek Allen

Victoria
de los Angeles
as *Mimi*





National Concerts & Artists

Inge Borkh



Inge Borkh
as
Elektra

Erismann

Inge Borkh
as *Silvana*
in Respighi's
'La Fiamma'





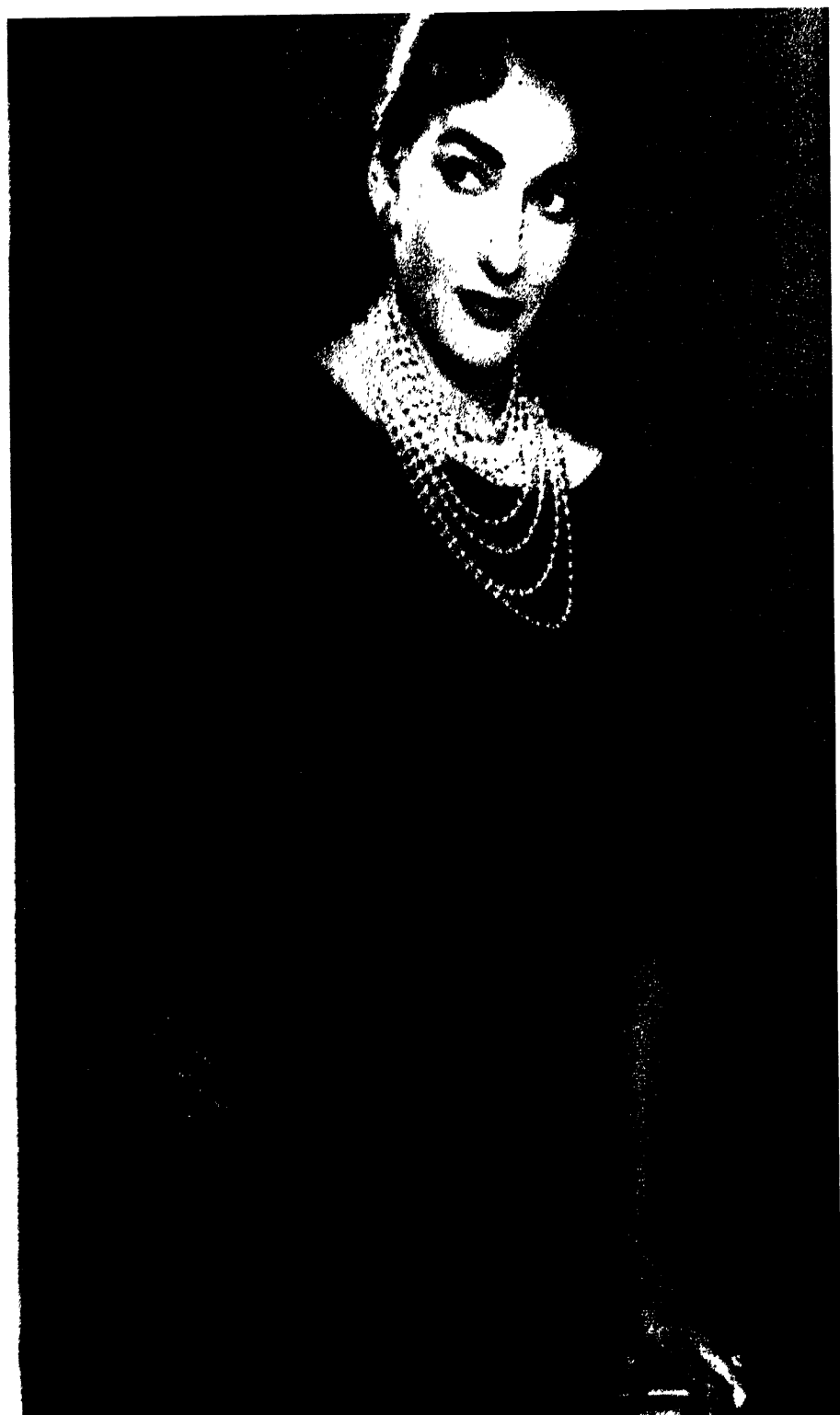


Gré Brouwenstijn
as *Leonore* in the
Wieland Wagner produc
of 'Fidelio'

Lipnitzki

Gré Brouwenstijn







Callas
as *Amina* in
'La Sonnambula'

Piccagliani

Callas
as *Elvira* in
'I Puritani'





Joan Cross
as *Queen Elizabeth*
in Britten's 'Gloriana'

Helga Sharland

Joan Cross at home

Angus McBean



in the second place, Callas's tendency to make rather ugly sounds at times is so often in evidence, that any suggestions one makes are sure to annoy some people as much as they will please others. Possibly her performance of *Tosca* in the complete Columbia recording under de Sabata (33CX 1094-5 and Angel 35060-1) is the best thing she has done. Her wonderful *Norma* performance is an exciting affair, showing up the singer's weaknesses and dramatic instinct (Columbia 33CX 1179-81 and Angel 35148-50). She has also taken part in the complete *Il Turco in Italia*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *I Puritani*, *Rigoletto*, *Forza del Destino*, *Aida*, *Cavalleria Rusticana*, *Pagliacci* and *Madama Butterfly*. Her Puccini recital on Columbia 33CX 1204 (Angel 35195) and her miscellaneous recital on Columbia 33CX 1321 and Angel 35270 show this singer's amazing versatility. (She has also recorded a complete *La Traviata* and *La Gioconda* for Cetra, but these are not available in Great Britain.)

LISA DELLA CASA

THROUGHOUT this short book readers will find that the personal note intrudes on its pages frequently. In other words the author is not averse to putting into print his own views about artists, nor to telling how in many cases he first heard them, often when they were quite unknown, and made a note, either mental or written, that here was an artist to watch.

It was in 1947, during a broadcast of *Arabella* from Salzburg, with Maria Reining in the title part, that I first heard Lisa Della Casa. She was singing the rôle of Zdenka, and at that time was a comparatively unknown guest artist, appearing with the Vienna Company. The exquisite young voice of silvery quality was one of those which immediately thrilled the listener, and made one wonder why the possessor of such a voice was not better known. It was not very long before she was.

Lisa Della Casa was born in 1919 in Burgdorf near Berne, the daughter of an Italian-Swiss doctor and his Bavarian wife. When she was fifteen she went to Zurich to study with Dr. Margarete Haeser, who has been her only teacher. Her first engagement was at Solothurn-Biel, during the early years of the war. There she made her début in the title rôle of *Madama Butterfly*, following it soon after with an appearance as Antonia in *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*. In 1943 she was engaged by the Stadttheater in Zurich, where she made her first appearance as Mimì. She remained a member of the Zurich ensemble until 1947, singing most of the light soprano rôles.

Following her Salzburg appearances in 1947, she was engaged in Vienna, where her rôles included Nedda in *Pagliacci* and Zerlina in *Fra Diavolo*. She returned to Salzburg in 1948 to sing Marzelline in *Fidelio*, and the following summer, when she sang the rôle of the Countess in Richard Strauss's *Capriccio*. This was really the turning point of her career, for so great was her success that she found herself famous all over Europe, and invitations to sing in the leading opera houses of the world poured in. The year 1949 was important for another and more personal reason: in that year she married Dragan Debelievic, a Yugoslavian.

In 1951 she came to Great Britain for the first time, making her début as the Countess (*Figaro*) at Glyndebourne. Appearances followed during that year in Munich, where she was heard as Sophie (*Der Rosenkavalier*) and in the title rôle of Richard Strauss's *Arabella*. It is as Arabella that Lisa Della Casa has perhaps enjoyed her greatest successes, and having first sung the rôle of Zdenka in the same opera she seems to have a really deep feeling and understanding for this rôle. Arabella's scenes with her younger sister are intensely moving in Miss Della Casa's hands. Just as she has sung the two leading rôles in *Arabella*, so in another Richard Strauss opera, *Der Rosenkavalier*, she has graduated from the part of Sophie to that of the Marschallin,

singing Octavian on the way. Other than Lotte Lehmann, I do not think any artist can claim this distinction.

Singing the music Strauss has written for the female voice must be one of the most gratifying experiences for a soprano, and it is as a Strauss singer that Lisa Della Casa is pre-eminent to-day. In addition to the Strauss parts already mentioned she has sung Ariadne at Salzburg and Munich, and has specialised in singing the "Four Last Songs" of that composer at concerts. After Strauss perhaps her favourite composer is Mozart. Donna Elvira, Donna Anna, the Countess and Pamina are among her most often sung rôles. Modern opera, too, has attractions for this singer, and besides appearing as Die junge Frau in the première of Willy Burkhard's *Die Schwarze Spinne*, she has also created the rôles of Fräulein Bürstner, Die Frau des Gerichtsdieners and Leni in Einem's *Der Prozess*.

Not every singer who possesses a beautiful voice is also blessed with personal beauty, and not the least of Miss Della Casa's assets on and off the stage is her charming appearance. When she is not singing in New York or Vienna and can find time to leave the recording studio and concert platform, she and her husband, together with their little daughter Wesna, pass their time in Schloss Gottlieben an old castle which they have bought near Thurgau.

To sum up the vocal attainments of this artist I can perhaps do no better than to quote what the English critic Desmond Shawe-Taylor wrote about her Arabella: "Having hugely enjoyed Della Casa's Salzburg broadcasts, I was curious to see and hear her in reality. She does not disappoint expectation; a charming and graceful actress, she spins out Strauss's soaring vocal line with smooth legato and exquisite taste."

RECORDINGS

Lisa Della Casa has taken part in three of the complete recordings of Mozart operas issued in 1956 by Decca as part of the Mozart celebrations. These are *Le Nozze di Figaro*, in which she sings the rôle of the Countess under Kleiber (LXT 5088-91 and LL. 1309-12), *Don Giovanni*, in which she sings the rôle of Donna Elvira under Josef Krips (LXT 5103-6 and LL. 1299-1302), and *Così fan tutte*, in which she sings Fiordiligi under Karl Böhm (LXT 5107-9 and LL. 1286-8). Perhaps her outstanding record is Decca's LXT 2865 (LL. 856), which contains her performances of the Arabella-Zdenka duet, the closing duet with Mandryka and the "Four Last Songs" of Strauss.

JOAN CROSS

I DO NOT THINK I will meet with any contradiction if I say that the most outstanding figure in British opera during the last twenty or so years has been Joan Cross. Not only was she the most popular singer at Sadler's Wells both before and during the war, but as director of that company during the most difficult period of its history (1943 to 1945), as a prime mover in the formation of the English Opera Group and as co-principal of the Opera School in London she has probably contributed more to opera in England than anyone else one can think of.

Joan Cross was born in London in 1900, and was educated at St. Paul's School. There under the influence of Holst she began to display an interest in music which led to her taking up the violin, and then a talent for singing which took her to the Trinity College of Music. Her vocal studies were under Dawson Freer, and in 1924 she joined the chorus at the Old Vic, but it was not very long before she was spotted by Lilian Baylis, who soon had her singing small parts. Cherubino in *Figaro* and the First Lady in *The Magic Flute* were soon followed by Elisabeth in *Tannhäuser* and both Mercedes and Frasquita in *Carmen*. The repertory at the Old Vic in the 1920's included the "English Ring"—*The Bohemian Girl*, *The Lily of Killarney* and *Mariùana*—and so it was not surprising that Joan Cross was also heard as Anne Chute in the second of these. The Old Vic was also a true repertory company, and so one week Joan Cross might have been heard as *Aïda*, and the following as the Priestess in the same opera. By the time that Sadler's Wells was opened in 1931, this singer's repertory included Elsa in *Lohengrin*, Pamina, Mimì and Donna Elvira.

During the next few years Joan Cross assumed most of the leading lyric and dramatic soprano parts in the Vic-Wells repertory. There must be hundreds of opera-goers like this writer, for whom she was their first Countess, first Violetta, first Amelia in *Un Ballo in Maschera*; and off the beaten track she sang in a number of first performances at Sadler's Wells, including Lady Macbeth in Lawrence Collingwood's *Macbeth*, Koupava in Rimsky-Korsakov's *Snow Maiden*, Miltirissa in the same composer's *Tsar Saltàn*, and the wife in Arthur Benjamin's *The Devil Take Her*. In 1934 and 1935 she appeared at Covent Garden during the summer international seasons. In the first year she was heard as Desdemona to Lauritz Melchior's *Otello*, and in the second as Micaëla to Conchita Supervia's *Carmen*; both these works were conducted by Beecham. In the last two years before the war the standard of opera at Sadler's Wells was very high. This is not merely a rash statement, but one which can be substantiated if the reader cares to refer to the newspaper files for those years in any public library. There under Lawrence Collingwood and Warwick Braithwaite, with a fine ensemble of singers, many works were attempted which might have

daunted an opera house with resources twice the size: *Der Rosenkavalier* with Joan Cross as a most moving and aristocratic Marschallin, *Die Walküre* with this same artist as a human and vibrant Sieglinde, and a fine new production of *Don Giovanni* with Joan Cross now the Donna Anna. Then came the war.

After a first wartime season, during which the theatre courageously mounted a new production of *Otello*, came the blitz. Sadler's Wells was taken over as a rest centre, and from September, 1940, to June, 1945, the company was without a permanent London home. It was at this time that Tyrone Guthrie organized a tour of Great Britain for the company, or rather for a handful of singers and musicians. With the minimum of scenery and stage apparatus they took a half-dozen operas to parts of the country which had not heard opera before. Then came a visit to the New Theatre in London, and a threat to the existence of the whole organization, for no-one seemed willing to take over the direction of the company. It was then that Joan Cross assumed the mantle of Lilian Baylis. Not only did she direct the destinies of the company, but even found time to sing in an occasional performance herself.

One of the artists whom she engaged to sing with the company was the tenor Peter Pears. Among the rôles in which he appeared was Alfredo in *La Traviata*, and a visit of his close friend Benjamin Britten to one of those performances so impressed the young British composer that he offered the first performance of *Peter Grimes* to Joan Cross. The première took place in June, 1945, with Joan Cross as Ellen Orford and Peter Pears in the title rôle. This marked the beginning of an exciting new chapter in the history of British opera. This is not the place to discuss the struggles which went on within the Sadler's Wells Company at this period, but the result was that Joan Cross and a number of artists left the company and formed themselves in association with Benjamin Britten into the English Opera Group. With that organization Joan Cross began yet another phase in her career. She created the rôles of the Female Chorus in *The Rape of Lucretia* in 1946, Mrs. Billows in *Albert Herring* in 1947, and Mrs. Grose in *The Turn of the Screw* in 1954.

Covent Garden had by now re-opened its doors as a National Opera House, and although to the regret of nearly every opera-goer we were never able to hear Joan Cross's Marschallin again, she did at least produce the first post-war *Rosenkavalier*. Between 1947 and 1950 she sang a number of performances of Ellen Orford, and in 1953 created the part of Queen Elizabeth I in Britten's Coronation opera, *Gloriana*. During the 1954—55 season she was persuaded once more to sing the part of the Countess in *Figaro* for a few performances. Last autumn (1955), after a short London season with the English Opera Group, she decided to retire from the stage. However although we may not hear her sing again, she is not lost to opera, for at the Opera School she is able to hand on the benefit of her vast experience to a rising generation of singers. She does not use this vast experience to teach people to sing—she does not claim to be a voice teacher—but to teach interpretation and movement, matching words to music, "feeling" a rôle. These were the hall-marks of a Joan Cross operatic performance on the stage; these are the things which she is handing on.

RECORDINGS

Joan Cross's work for the English Opera Group has been perpetuated by the performances of her original parts in *The Rape of Lucretia* (Female Chorus) on deleted HMV C3699-3706 and Victor 12-0778A to 0785B, and in *The Turn of the Screw* (Mrs. Grose) on English Decca LXT 5038-9 and London LL. 1207-8. Most of this artist's earlier recordings are no longer in the current catalogues but can be obtained from the many record dealers that abound in London and other cities. Specially recommended are her performances of Fiordiligi's "Per pietà" (*Così fan tutte*) on Columbia DX 1353, the Countess's aria (*Figaro*) and Pamina's aria (*The Magic Flute*) on C 3187, and Desdemona's "Willow-song" and "Ave Maria" (*Otello*) on C 2932.

SYLVIA FISHER

IT IS PERHAPS NATURAL that most great opera singers in history have been either Italian or German by birth; natural, because the Italian and German opera traditions are the greatest and the oldest; but two other parts of the world where there is little or no native opera have produced their own quota of international artists: Scandinavia and Australasia. Possibly there is something in the climate of these two localities which is beneficial to the development of the human voice, for otherwise it is not very easy to explain the plethora of Wagnerians who have hailed from Northern Europe, and warm-voiced artists suited to both German and Italian opera who have come from the Antipodes. During the last fifty years names like Melba, Florence Austral and Marjorie Lawrence have been known internationally, and at the present time it is doubtful whether London's two opera houses, Covent Garden and Sadler's Wells, could exist without their Australian contingents.

I do not wish to make invidious distinctions, but I am sure most of her colleagues would agree with me that Sylvia Fisher is perhaps the greatest singer Australia has produced since Melba. Like her famous predecessor she was born in Melbourne, and studied piano and singing while still at school, later entering the Conservatory of her native city. When she had taken her diploma, she studied for a number of years with Adolf Spivakovsky. In 1932, while still a student, she made her first operatic appearance as Hermione in Lully's *Cadmus and Hermione* at the Comedy Theatre, Melbourne. This was her only operatic performance until she came to Europe after the war, but she did sing in many complete operatic broadcasts, including *Aida*, *Don Giovanni* (in which she was heard as Donna Anna) and *Lohengrin* (in which she was heard as Ortrud). It was however as a lieder and oratorio singer that Sylvia Fisher was known in Australia.

In December, 1947, she decided to come to England and pursue a career as a lieder singer or on the operatic stage. Her first year in London was a lonely one, and during that time she gave no less than five Covent Garden auditions! Finally she was engaged as a solo artist, and asked to prepare the rôle of Leonore in *Fidelio*, which was receiving its first post-war production at Covent Garden under Karl Rankl. The producer was Friedrich Schramm; his advice to her, when he heard that she had never been on the stage before, was: "Good! All you need do is to leave your hands at your sides and sing. Let the music speak for itself." To this day Sylvia Fisher follows that advice, and with great effect.

It was exactly one year after her arrival in England that she made her operatic début. The *Fidelio* was followed by appearances as the Countess in *Figaro*, and in the summer of 1949 she sang her first Wagnerian rôle—the Third Norn in *Götter-*

dämmerung. It is of course as a Wagnerian that she has established herself, not only in England but on the Continent too. Wagner has always been Sylvia Fisher's first love—ever since 1936 when she won the "Sun Aria" competition by singing Elisabeth's Greeting from *Tannhäuser*—and she has said she is never happier than when she is singing Wagner. That must be obvious to all have heard her Sieglinde. In the 1949—50 season Elsa in *Lohengrin* and Sieglinde in *Die Walküre* were added to her Wagnerian repertory, and she also sang her first Marschallin in *Der Rosenkavalier*. By the time she had sung her second *Ring* cycle in the summer of 1951, critics and older opera-goers were already comparing her warm, womanly Sieglinde to that of Lotte Lehmann, and as time went on another of that great singer's pre-war rôles, the Marschallin, developed in Sylvia Fisher's hands into one of the best interpretations of that part to be heard in Europe.

In 1953 she faced perhaps the greatest challenge of her career. She was asked to sing Isolde at Covent Garden. Not only did she have to contend with the memory of her immediate predecessor, Kirsten Flagstad, but also with the great amount of head-shaking that went on, and mutterings that this rôle would surely ruin her voice. She overcame both these obstacles successfully; for first she went to Berlin to study the rôle with another great pre-war Isolde, Frida Leider, and then proceeded to confound all the critics by singing one of the most womanly and moving Isolde's heard at Covent Garden. The top notes held no terror for her, and the great moments of the score which called for power and vehemence were encompassed with skill and ease.

Since then Sylvia Fisher has sung Ellen Orford in *Peter Grimes*, Agathe in *Der Freischütz* and Elisabeth in *Tannhäuser*, and as I write these words she is preparing for her first Brünnhilde (*Die Walküre*) which will be sung with the Covent Garden company during its 1956 spring tour. She will be the first British Brünnhilde since Eva Turner.

After Great Britain, most of Sylvia Fisher's operatic singing has been done in Italy. In Rome she sang Sieglinde under Erich Kleiber in 1952, Sicily has heard her Isolde, and Bologna her Guttrune. From Bologna comes her husband, Signor Ubaldo Gardini, and together they have turned their Bayswater home into a corner of Italy, where they lavish Italian hospitality and food on their guests. Although Sylvia Fisher is Italian by marriage and has a great love for Italy, she has not yet sung an Italian rôle, but there is some talk of her singing the title part of *Turandot* before very long. Just as twenty years ago the greatest *Turandot* was a British-born artist—Eva Turner—so perhaps her successor as Brünnhilde might also prove to be another great exponent of Puccini's most exacting opera.

RECORDINGS

It is a sorry reflection on the gramophone record industry in Great Britain that Covent Garden's own prima donna and one of the greatest of contemporary Wagnerian singers has not been invited to make a single record.



Lisa della Casa

Atelier Fayer

Lisa
della Casa
as *Arabella*





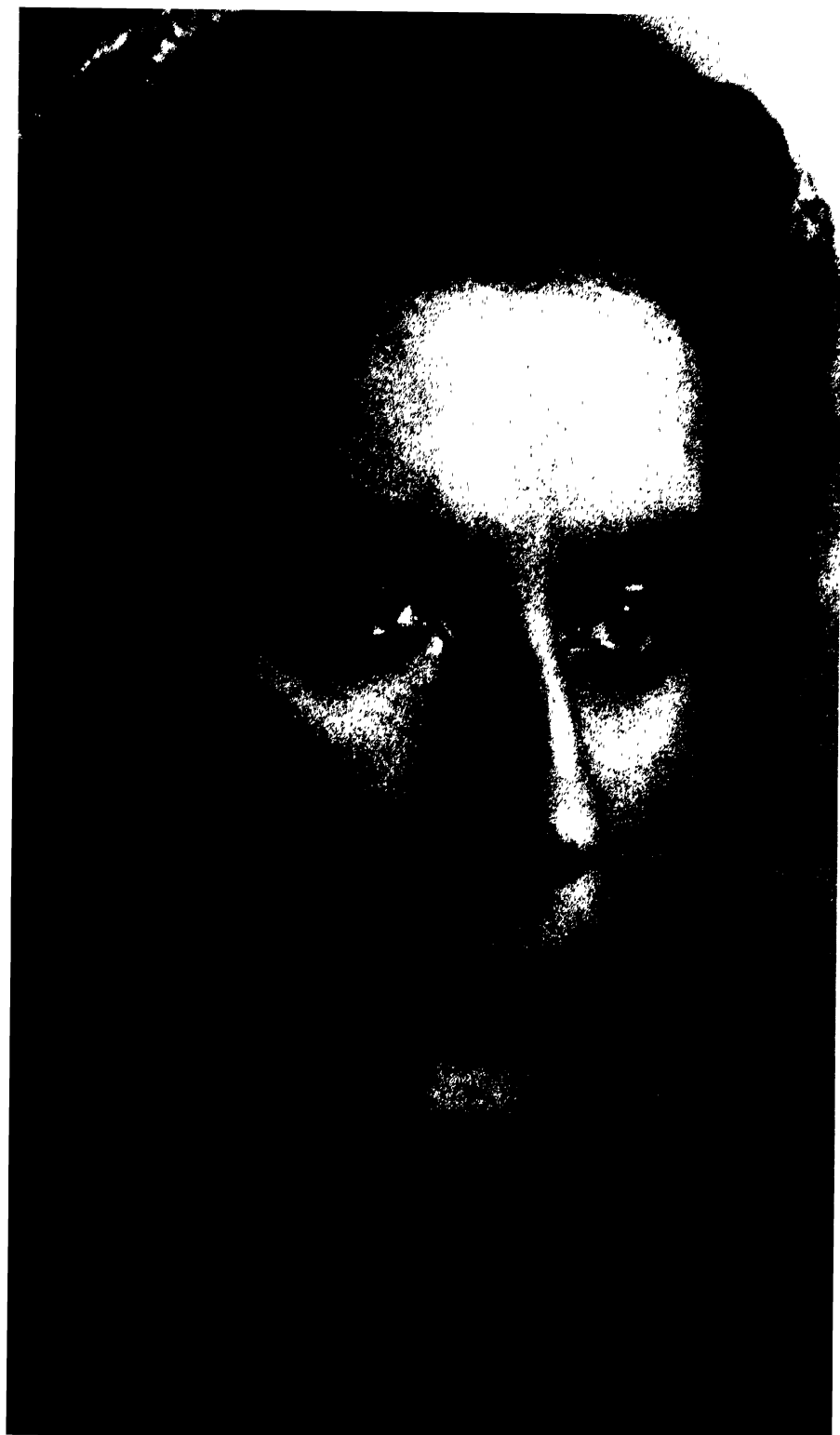


Sylvia Fisher
at home

'Opera' Archives

Sylvia Fisher
as *Isolde*







Goltz
as *Leonore*
in 'Fidelio'

Organisation Artistique Internationale

Goltz
as *Antigonae*
in Carl Orff's opera





news

Adèle Leigh at home

Adèle Leigh
as *Cherubino*







KIRSTEN FLAGSTAD

IT IS A MOST depressing thought that probably throughout the world there are many potential operatic singers, people with fine voices who have not yet been discovered, and as things are may well remain undiscovered. This thought is prompted by the story of the rise to fame of Kirsten Flagstad, who after singing in complete obscurity in her native Oslo for more than fifteen years only became an international celebrity by mere chance.

She was born in July, 1895, at Hammar, a small town some seventy miles north of Oslo. Her mother was a professional opera coach, and her father a violinist and conductor. In her early childhood she displayed an interest in singing, and when she was seven had learned a number of songs by Schubert and Grieg. By her twelfth year, though she had not received a formal singing lesson, she knew the whole rôle of Elsa and not long afterwards that of Aida. In 1911 she began to study with Ellen Schytte-Jacobsen, and two years later she made her first appearance on the stage of the National Theatre in Oslo as Nuri in d'Albert's *Tiefeland*. She attracted enough attention to cause a group of local amateurs to finance a further period of training. Her teachers during this time were Albert Westwang and Gillis Bratt. In 1917 came what she likes to look on as her formal stage début in the rôle of Martha in Kienzl's *Evangelimann*. In the following year she was married, and in 1919 her daughter was born.

From 1919 until 1933 she sang chiefly in Oslo, with occasional appearances in Copenhagen, Stockholm, Gothenburg and Helsingfors. During those fifteen years she sang a vast variety of rôles, ranging from Rodelinda, in Handel's opera of that name, to Isolde; from Anne Page in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* to the title rôle in *Euryanthe*; and from Mimì in *La Bohème* to Minnie in *La Fanciulla del West*. In addition to opera the Oslo Theatre's repertory included a large number of operettas, and in these too Flagstad regularly appeared.

In 1933 she was invited to sing two small rôles at the Bayreuth Festival—Ortlinde and the Third Norn. In 1934 she was again invited to Bayreuth, and was heard as Sieglinde and Guttrune. During that summer she auditioned for Gatti-Casazza, the Manager, and Arthur Bodanzky, the Wagnerian conductor, of the Metropolitan Opera. Whether or not she sang well on that occasion we do not know, but she recollects that the room in which she gave her audition was very heavily curtained, and this had the effect of muffling her voice, so that her listeners were not particularly impressed and merely offered her a one-year contract, little realising that they had chanced to engage the outstanding Wagnerian soprano of our time. So in January, 1935, this completely unknown Norwegian soprano arrived in New York and began rehearsals

for her début a few weeks later as Sieglinde. When she first opened her mouth on the Metropolitan stage the Siegmund, Paul Althouse, was so astonished that he missed his cue, and the conductor, Bodanzky, dropped his bâton in amazement. In a moment the news spread round the opera house, and before anyone knew what was happening, stage and auditorium were full of people eager to hear this unknown singer. Her New York début on 2nd February, 1935, was an enormous success, and she followed her Sieglinde by appearances as Isolde, Brünnhilde, Elisabeth, Elsa and Kundry; these last four rôles she was singing for the first time.

In May, 1936, she made her Covent Garden début as Isolde, following it with Brünnhilde, and repeated her New York triumphs in London. She returned to Covent Garden in 1937, and was again heard in those two parts, as well as Senta in *Der fliegende Holländer*. Her colleagues at that time in London and New York included Maria Müller, Kerstin Thorborg, Karin Branzell, Lauritz Melchior, Max Lorenz, Herbert Janssen, Rudolf Bockelmann, Alexander Kipnis and Emmanuel List. Beecham, Furtwängler and Reiner were the conductors. That was truly the "golden age" of Wagnerian opera.

Flagstad remained in New York until the end of the 1940—41 season, and then returned to Norway to join her second husband (she had divorced her first husband and married Henry Johansen in 1930), who had been taken ill. Although it was impossible for her to leave Europe during the remaining war years, she was able to make her way to Switzerland in 1942, where she sang in Zurich as Leonore, Rezia (*Oberon*) and in the title rôle of *Alceste*. These were the only appearances that she made during the war. In 1945 her husband was arrested and accused of collaborating with the Germans. He was still an ill man and died before the trial, and since then his innocence has been established. It is necessary to bring in this political sidelight, because of the unreasonable attitude over Flagstad that existed in America in the years immediately after the war, and the senseless demonstrations that were made by small-minded people when she made her first post-war appearances in New York. In London, however, people took things far more calmly—that is, politically speaking, for anything but calm reigned at the Albert Hall on that evening in November, 1947, when Flagstad made her first London appearance since before the war. When we heard that gorgeous voice pouring forth a stream of golden tone, effortless, radiant and apparently unending, we felt as the thirsty desert traveller must feel when he sights an oasis.

That concert was conducted by Karl Rankl, who had recently been appointed Covent Garden's Musical Director, and in 1948 he invited Flagstad to sing Isolde in German and Brünnhilde (*Die Walküre*) in English. She returned to Covent Garden every year until 1951, singing Brünnhilde in the complete *Ring*, Kundry, Leonore in *Fidelio* (in this she spoke her dialogue in English and sang in German) and Sieglinde.

A plan to sing the title rôle of *Alceste* in London, following her success in this part in New York, unfortunately came to nothing. She took her farewell of Wagner in two performances of Isolde with the Covent Garden company at Liverpool during

the Festival of Britain celebrations in the summer of 1951. Although she gave up the Wagnerian stage, she was persuaded by her great friend, the actor Bernard Miles, to take the part of Dido in Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* in the little Mermaid Theatre that he had built in the grounds of his house in north-west London; this she did in 1952 and 1953. Her concert appearances continued until 1954, and she has recently been persuaded by the Swedish Radio to sing Brünnhilde in a studio performance of *Götterdämmerung*, staggered over three nights. By the time these words appear in print she will have also sung two performances of *Alceste* with the BBC.

I think Flagstad is one of the most placid and unruffled operatic singers I have yet met. I will never cease to be amazed at the way she calmly sat in her dressing-room, not incidentally the star dressing-room at Covent Garden (that was too far away from the stage) but in one of the other rooms, knitting while waiting for her cue in the last act of *Tristan und Isolde*. Perhaps it was this Scandinavian calmness of character that was responsible for a certain coolness in her interpretations during the first part of her career. Many people have thought it a great pity that she retired when still at the height of her powers, but it is a wise singer who knows the right time to take her farewell of the public, and Flagstad was a very wise singer.

RECORDINGS

Kirsten Flagstad's recordings can be divided into two groups: those that she made in the period from her American début until 1942, and those that she made during the few years before her retirement. In the first group are the Love Duet from *Lohengrin* and the Kundry/Parsifal scene from *Parsifal*, both with Lauritz Melchior, on HMV ALP 1276 (Victor LCT 1105). Although Kundry was not one of her best rôles, this recording gives the listener a wonderful idea of what Flagstad's voice was like during her great American days. The outstanding post-war recording is of her Isolde in the complete *Tristan und Isolde* performance under Furtwängler, with Ludwig Suthaus as Tristan (HMV ALP 1030-5 and Victor LM 6700). She has also recorded a complete performance of *Dido and Aeneas*, a memento of the Mermaid Theatre production (HMV ALP 1026 and LHMV 1007), and Brünnhilde's Immolation from *Götterdämmerung*, with Furtwängler and the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, on HMV ALP 1016 and LHMV 1072. English Decca have recorded the complete *Götterdämmerung* performance referred to above, and this is due for release this summer.

CHRISTEL GOLTZ

GERMANY has always taken its opera far more seriously than any other country, and so it is not surprising that there has been a tradition of great operatic actresses on the German stage, starting with Schröder-Devrient—one of the most famous of Leonores—who made such an impression on the youthful Wagner. Nearer our own day has only to think of Frida Leider and Martha Fuchs to realize how strong that tradition is. Christel Goltz is another of the outstanding singing actresses of German opera.

She was born in Dortmund of a theatrical family. It might come as a surprise to most people to learn that her parents were successful circus acrobats who toured with the famous Barnum and Bailey circus troupe, and were billed, with another member of their family, as the Goltz Trio. The youngest of eight children, Christel Goltz was left an orphan when she was ten. She began her musical studies at the Ornelli-Leeb School in Munich, working at handcraft, tapestry and needlework to pay for her lessons. She originally intended to become a dancer, and indeed her first engagement was in that capacity in Munich. Then she went to Fürth, the little town near Nürnberg from which the maidens in *Die Meistersinger* came to dance with the apprentices; there she was a member of the chorus in 1935, but she got her chance of singing a solo rôle, and an important one at that—Agathe in *Der Freischütz*. This was a production by the Intendant for young people, and Goltz's success in it led to her engagement at Plauen the following year. There she graduated to such rôles as Santuzza, Octavian and Eva. In the 1936—37 season she was engaged by the Dresden State Opera as a solo singer. Her Dresden début was as Rezia in *Oberon*, and she remained a member of the Dresden ensemble until the end of the 1949—50 season.

During her fourteen seasons at Dresden she built up an enormous repertory—to-day it totals more than one hundred parts—including Leonore in *Fidelio*, Fiordiligi, Elisabeth in *Tannhäuser*, Desdemona, Tosca, Aida, Ariadne and Salome. Her success in the Richard Strauss operas was such that Karl Böhm, who had been the Generalmusikdirektor at Dresden, subsequently invited her to sing all the major soprano parts in the 1943—44 Strauss Festival in Vienna. While in Dresden she married Theodor Schenk, who was a pupil of Hindemith and a horn-player in the Dresden Staatskapelle. He now acts as her coach and accompanist, and has never missed a single one of his wife's performances.

Between 1947 and 1950 Goltz divided her time between Dresden and Berlin, singing at both the Staatsoper and Städtische Oper in the latter city. It was in Berlin that she scored a great personal success as Jenufa and as Amelia in *Un Ballo in Maschera*.

Before 1950 the name of Christel Goltz meant little or nothing to the British opera-goer, although a few enthusiasts were beginning to talk about the reports they had received of a wonderful new Salome in Dresden. In the summer of 1950 Goltz sang that rôle at the Munich Festival, and it was not long after that Covent Garden engaged her to sing the same part. Besides Salome, her London appearances have included Leonore in *Fidelio* and Marie in *Wozzeck* in the first stage performance of the opera in England, under Kleiber. The provinces however had been a little luckier, for during the 1953 tour of the Covent Garden company she sang Musetta in *La Bohème*—an interpretation which those who heard it still say is one of the best they have witnessed of this part. When she made her début during the 1954—55 season at the Metropolitan Opera, her Salome was greeted with the same success as elsewhere.

It is surprising that with so large a repertory Goltz has so far only created one part. That was the title rôle in Liebermann's *Penelope* at Salzburg in 1954, for which she earned the unanimous praise of the critics, Austrian and foreign. Another modern opera for which she has a special liking is Carl Orff's *Antigone*, in which she sings the title rôle, and she has said she would very much like to perform this opera in London.

Asked what her favourite rôle is, she says: "Whatever I happen to be singing", but she has expressed a desire to sing Isolde and Brünnhilde, and one can easily imagine the intensity that she would bring to these two parts. Goltz's voice is not of the quality one generally associates with heavy dramatic soprano parts; it is clear and brilliant, but not inherently beautiful. Like several of her German colleagues, she pays a great deal of attention to the treatment of text, and prepares her parts with enormous care, studying the background both of the opera and its characters if they happen to have historical significance. Besides being a singer, Goltz is an amateur artist, and she specialises in making sketches of herself in the many rôles she has sung. These are to be seen in her home near the Schönbrunn Palace in Vienna, where she lives with her husband and young son Theo. It has a beautiful garden, for gardening is this singer's other hobby.

RECORDINGS

Other than singing the title rôle in the complete English Decca *Salome* under Clemens Krauss (LXT 2863-4 and London LL. 1038-9), there are no recordings of Christel Goltz available in Great Britain. She has however an extensive list of titles to her credit in the Deutsche Grammophon catalogue, including an impressive recording of Elektra's "Monologue", the scene with Klytemnestra and the "Recognition Scene" (DG 18090 and 19038 and American Decca 9723). She has also made records of some extracts from Orff's *Die Kluge* and Sutermeister's *Romeo und Julia*. At the time of going to press, English Decca have just released a complete recording of Strauss's *Die Frau ohne Schatten* in which Goltz sings the part of the Dyer's Wife (LXT 5180-4).

ELISABETH GRÜMMER

BEFORE THE WAR the art of Tiana Lemnitz had won for that artist many admirers throughout Europe, and one was eagerly waiting for her successor to appear on the German opera scene. For those younger opera-goers to whom Lemnitz may only be a name, let me say a few brief words about her. She was a lyric soprano, whose exquisite *mezza-voce* singing and lovely pianissimo tones enchanted listeners in such parts as Eva, Elsa, Pamina and Octavian. Not young when she made her début in London in 1936, she had all but retired after the war. It is Elisabeth Grümmer who has come to be regarded as her successor in most of the rôles in which Lemnitz had excelled.

She was born in Alsace-Lorraine, and after the first war moved to Thuringia with her parents. She studied for the stage in Meiningen, and for three years pursued a career as an actress, until she married the leader of the Aachen Orchestra, and gave up the straight stage. Until this time no idea of becoming a singer had entered her mind, but having a naturally beautiful voice she was persuaded to study singing, and for six years she pursued this course at Aachen. Her début took place in 1941 in that city as the First Flower-Maiden in *Parsifal*, and this was followed by a successful Octavian. From Aachen she went to Duisburg, but during the rest of the war she worked in a post office, while her husband did war-work in a factory. In 1946 she went to Berlin to join the Städtische Oper, and there she sang Agathe in *Der Freischütz*, Desdemona, Marenka, Eva, Pamina, and Ellen Orford in the first Berlin performance of *Peter Grimes*. Her Eva was so successful that she was invited to sing it in the Berlin Staatsoper in the Eastern Zone, and also in Dresden. In 1951 she made her first appearance at Covent Garden in the memorable production of *Die Meistersinger* which marked Sir Thomas Beecham's return to the Opera House for the first time since 1939. Appearances followed at La Scala and in other European operatic centres, and in the summer of 1952 at the Munich Festival she sang one of the most aristocratic Octavians in my opera-going experience.

In 1952 she was invited to sing as a guest artist with the Hamburg Opera at the Edinburgh Festival. There she was heard as Agathe, Pamina and Octavian, the last in place of the indisposed Martha Mödl. Since then Grümmer has shared most of her time between the Vienna State Opera and the Berlin Städtische Oper, being on joint contract to both houses. Salzburg has heard her Donna Anna and Agathe, and during the Glyndebourne Mozart celebrations of 1956 she will be singing the part of Ilia in *Idomeneo* and the Countess in some of the performances of *Figaro*.

Grümmer is an accomplished oratorio singer, and has taken part in many concerts with the Berlin and Vienna Philharmonic Orchestras. Although her appearances in

Great Britain have been few, and her gramophone records fewer, she has already won for herself much admiration among the more discriminating opera-goers. It is to be hoped that her connection with Glyndebourne which is about to begin will mean that far more of this artist's work will be heard in this country.

RECORDINGS

Elisabeth Grümmer's recordings to date include Hänsel in the complete *Hänsel und Gretel* performance (Columbia 33CX 1096-7 and Angel 35049-50), and the soprano part in Brahms's *Deutsche Requiem* with Fischer-Dieskau, conducted by Rudolf Kempe (HMV ALPS 1351 and ALP 1352).

HILDE GÜDEN

"LOVELY TO LOOK AT, lovelier to listen to", wrote a leading American critic of Hilde Güden after her New York début in 1951 as Gilda, and after having heard and seen her as Zerbinetta in *Ariadne auf Naxos* at Salzburg this is a verdict with which I must agree.

She was born in Vienna in 1917, of an Austrian father and a Hungarian mother. When she was sixteen she entered the Vienna Conservatory to study dancing and the piano, but it was not long before vocal studies took first place, with Madame Wetzelsberger as her teacher. At seventeen she made her début in an operetta called *Servus, Servus*, by Robert Stolz, and a year later became a member of the Zurich Opera, making her début as Cherubino. In 1941 Clemens Krauss, who was then Generalmusikdirektor of the Munich Opera, engaged Güden as first soubrette. Her performance of Despina in *Così fan tutte* was seen by Richard Strauss, who suggested that she sing the part of Sophie. This she learned not only in German, but in Italian for a performance in Rome, which led to a series of engagements in Italy at the Scala, Florence and other leading opera houses. After her first appearance as Sophie, Richard Strauss gave her a photograph of himself with the inscription "to my Sophie Güden".

Although she sang frequently as a guest artist in Vienna from 1941, it was not until the 1946—47 season that she became a permanent member of the Vienna ensemble. Her Covent Garden début was made in September, 1947, with the Vienna company, as Zerlina, and during their London visit she also sang Cherubino.

Güden's connection with the Salzburg Festival dates from 1946, and she has been heard there almost every summer since then. Besides singing the Mozart soubrette rôles—Zerlina and Despina—she has been heard as Ilia in *Idomeneo*, Amor in *Orphée*, Sophie in *Der Rosenkavalier*, Zerbinetta in *Ariadne auf Naxos*, Julia in Boris Blacher's *Romeo und Julia*, Lucia in *The Rape of Lucretia* and Norina in *Don Pasquale*. In 1950 she was given the title of Kammersängerin, one of the youngest singers ever to be accorded this title in Vienna.

New York first heard her in 1950, when she made her début as Gilda, and she has since sung there as Musetta, Rosalinda in *Die Fledermaus* (this rôle she sang in English) and Anne Trulove in *The Rake's Progress*. Although the greater part of her repertory has been in the lyric soprano range, two years ago she went through a further period of study in order to be able to cope with really high coloratura rôles. This newly acquired technique was first displayed at Salzburg in 1954 as Zerbinetta. Her performance came as a surprise to most people, and to her already fresh and charming voice and youthful personality she added an agility and élan which gained for her a great personal triumph.



Hilde Güden
as
Zerbinetta

Hilde Güden
as
Gilda

Atelier Fayer





Willi Saeger



Grünmer
as the Countess
in 'Figaro'

Willy Saeger

Grünmer
as
Octavian





Angus McBea



Joan Hammond
at home

'Opera' Archives

Joan Hammond
as *Tosca*





Jurinac
as *the Composer*
in 'Ariadne auf Naxos'

Guy Gravett



Jurinac
as *Donna Elvira*
in 'Don Giovanni'



Sena Jurinac



Martha Mödl
as *Carmen*

'Opera' Archives

Martha Mödl
as *Isolde*
at Bayreuth



RECORDINGS

Hilde Güden has taken part in three of the Decca Mozart complete recordings: as Pamina in *Die Zauberflöte* under Karl Böhm (LXT 5085-7 and LXX 33), Susanna in *Figaro* under Erich Kleiber (LXT 5088-91 and LXX 35), and Zerlina in *Don Giovanni* under Josef Krips (LXT 5103-6 and LXXA 34). Of these her Zerlina is the most satisfactory performance, for in the other two rôles, although she sings well enough, she does not seem to penetrate very deeply below the surface of the character. She is also Musetta in the Decca *La Bohème* (LXT 2622-3 and London LL 462-3), the Eva in the complete *Meistersinger* (LXT 2659-64 and LLA 9), the Rosalinde in *Die Fledermaus* (LXT 2550-1 and LL 281-2)—this is a specially recommended set with Patzak as Eisenstein, conducted by Clemens Krauss—and Adina in *L'Elisir d'Amore* (LXT 51557). Of her single discs her numerous operetta recitals—for which kind of music this artist has a special affinity—are also recommended.

JOAN HAMMOND

TO THE BRITISH OPERA-GOER the war years were a particularly lean period. With Covent Garden closed and later used as a "palais de danse", with Sadler's Wells occupied by bombed-out families, opera was kept alive by the touring Carl Rosa and the homeless Sadler's Wells company. Among the brighter spots of the Carl Rosa's wartime seasons in London were the appearances of Joan Hammond. This artist, with her Italian sounding voice, and on the stage a real prima donna personality, brought something of the atmosphere of grand opera to those performances.

She was born in Wellington, New Zealand, in 1912, but received both her formal and musical education in Sydney, Australia. In her early life her chief interests were golf and tennis; indeed it was as a golfer that she attained fame in Australia, before she had sung a note. At the Sydney Conservatory she trained to be a violinist, and played with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. She discovered quite by accident that she had a voice, and in order to train it had to find some money. This she earned by writing sports reports for local newspapers. In 1936 Joan Hammond came to Europe to complete her vocal training in Vienna and Italy. On the threshold of her career in 1939, she suffered a serious setback, like so many young artists, on account of the outbreak of war in Europe.

During the early war years she was an ambulance driver, and then with the formation of both ENSA and CEMA employed her musical talents to entertain the forces. It was not until 1942 that she made her first stage appearance in Great Britain. This was as Violetta in *La Traviata*, a rôle she had sung most impressively in a radio performance of that opera for the BBC a year previously. From 1942—45 she appeared regularly with the Carl Rosa Company, and her rôles at that time included Marguerite in *Faust*, Leonora in *Il Trovatore*, Tosca and Cio-Cio-San. Within a short time she had built up a tremendous following, and I can think of no artist who has such a devoted band of "fans" as Joan Hammond. Her records, too, have had enormous sales, and an indication of the wide appeal that she has for non-operatic audiences is the frequency with which her recordings have been requested in programmes like "Housewives' Choice" and "Forces' Favourites". In this way she has made an important contribution to opera, by bringing it to audiences composed largely of people who generally fight shy of serious music.

In 1947 Joan Hammond was the first British artist to sing at the Vienna State Opera since before the war. There she was heard in four of her most famous rôles: Mimi, Tosca, Cio-Cio-San and Violetta. Although the Covent Garden Opera Company was formed in 1946, it was not until the 1948—49 season that Joan Hammond sang there. Leonore in *Fidelio* and Aida were two parts which she added to her repertory at

Covent Garden, and among the other parts she has sung there have been Cio-Cio-San and Tosca. Sadler's Wells engaged her to sing the part of Elizabeth de Valois in *Don Carlos* in the Verdi year, 1951. Joan Hammond has also appeared with the New York City Center Opera Company, and has sung a number of other rôles for the BBC, including Tatiana in *Eugene Onegin*, and the title rôles in *Thaïs*, *Manon Lescaut* and *Turandot*. As a concert artist and recitalist she is in great demand all over Great Britain, and she has made extensive tours of the Commonwealth. In 1953 she was awarded the O.B.E. for her services to music.

It is one of those strange things about the organisation of operatic life in this country that an artist of such talent and with so popular a following has not been a permanent member of any of our native operatic institutions.

RECORDINGS

From amongst Joan Hammond's many recordings a selection has been assembled on HMV ALP 1076, including her very good performances of arias from *Adriana Lecouvreur* and *La Wally*. On HMV DB 21549 there is an excellent rendering of Mathilde's aria from *Guillaume Tell*, and on DB 21625 a rarely recorded aria from Korngold's *Die tote Stadt*, backed by "L'altra notte" from Boito's *Mefistofele*.

SENA JURINAC

THOSE PEOPLE who are lucky enough to have been opera-goers in 1924 will remember that that was the year in which International Opera returned to Covent Garden after the First World War. In those days opera fans were not prepared in advance for new singers by having first heard them on the radio, while the volume of gramophone records was only a fraction of what it is to-day. So in that 1924 season the arrival of a whole new generation of Central European singers who had grown up since 1914 came as a complete surprise. Frida Leider, Lotte Lehmann, Delia Reinhardt and Elisabeth Schumann were four names to conjure with.

Something of the same kind of thing happened in the autumn of 1947 when the Vienna Opera paid its first post-war visit to London. But unlike 1924 Londoners were rather better prepared by the radio and gramophone for some of the newcomers. Some of them, however, were a trifle wary about forming opinions purely on the evidence of the gramophone, and so it was more than gratifying that a group of artists was introduced to them who could well be termed the successors of Leider, Lehmann, Reinhardt and Schumann. The singers I have in mind are Ljuba Welitsch, Sena Jurinac, Elisabeth Schwarzkopf and Irmgard Seefried. I am writing about all of them in this book.

Sbrenka (Sena for short) Jurinac was born in Travnik in Yugoslavia in October, 1921. Her mother is Viennese and her father Croatian. She was educated in Zagreb and studied at the Musikakademie for two years. From 1939 she studied with Maria Kostrencic, the teacher of Zinka Milanov, the only teacher with whom she worked regularly for an appreciable time. In 1942 she made her début at the Zagreb Opera as Mimi. While a member of the Zagreb company she created the part of Isabella in Werner Egk's *Columbus* and the title rôles in two Yugoslavian operas—*Suncanica* (Papandopulo) and *Morana* (Gotovac). She also sang the Countess in *Figaro*, Marguerite, Freia and a Flower Maiden in *Parsifal*.

In 1944 she was engaged by the Vienna State Opera, making her début there on 1st May, 1945, in the first performance of opera in Vienna after the liberation. This was as Cherubino in *Figaro*, under Josef Krips. She has remained a member of the Vienna company ever since, and her rôles there have included Donna Elvira in *Don Giovanni*, Pamina, Octavian, The Composer in *Ariadne*, Ighino in *Palestrina*, Mařenka, Eva, Manon, and Giulietta and Antonia in *Hoffmann*.

To the English opera-goer Jurinac is especially associated with the Glyndebourne Opera, where she has appeared every season since 1949. After singing a beautiful Dorabella in *Così fan tutte* in 1949 in Edinburgh, the following summer saw her at Glyndebourne as Fiordiligi, the elder of the two sisters in the same opera. I doubt

whether there has been a more ravishing Fiordiligi, either vocally or visually; certainly not in our time. Jurinac's inherent musicianship, sense of style and sincerity make her the ideal Mozart singer. Added to those virtues she also possesses a Mediterranean warmth which makes her Ilia in *Idomeneo* and Countess in *Figaro* intensely moving. Although looked upon now as an "international" star, she is completely unspoilt; one might almost say unsophisticated. That is much of her personal charm—that, plus her impish sense of humour on and off the stage. Perhaps it is her love of fun that makes her such an admirable interpreter of boys' rôles, for she is an outstanding Octavian and Cherubino, and possibly the finest interpreter of the part of The Composer in *Ariadne auf Naxos*, in which part she has been compared with Lotte Lehmann.

Glyndebourne has meant more to her than just singing in opera, for it was there that she met Sesto Bruscantini, the Italian baritone, to whom she is happily married. They love nothing better than to entertain their friends with stories of their adventures in the opera houses of Europe and with the delicious strudel and other Viennese dishes that she loves to cook.

RECORDINGS

Sena Jurinac's Donna Elvira, one of the most moving interpretations of that rôle in our day, has been faithfully captured on the complete recording of *Don Giovanni* (Philips ABL 3069-71 and Epic SC 6010). Her *Figaro* Countess does not come off so well in recorded performance, but HMV ALPS 1312 and ALP 1313-15 (Victor LM 6401) make a fitting memento of the 1955 Glyndebourne *Figaro* performances. Of Jurinac's single discs, her performance of Ilia's "Quando avran fine ormai . . . Padre, germani, addio!" from the first act of *Idomeneo*, and the exquisite "Zeffiretti lusinghieri" from the third act of the same opera are outstanding (HMV DB 21527 and 21525 respectively; in U.S.A., Victor LHMV 1021).

ADELE LEIGH

IN THE POPULAR MIND glamour and opera singers do not go together, and though the days of the four-square prima donna have passed, the idea of an operatical soprano appearing on a double-page spread in a glossy weekly takes some getting used to. Covent Garden's Adèle Leigh has enjoyed this distinction!

She was born in London in 1928, and after studying at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art she went to America, where she began to take music lessons at the Juillard School in New York. Her voice teachers were first Julius Gutman and then Maggie Teyte. Returning to England, she joined the Covent Garden Opera Company when not quite twenty, making her début in the small rôle of Xenia in *Boris Godunov* during the 1947/48 season. Rather like any young opera singer in a German opera house, during her first few seasons she only sang small rôles such as the Page and the Countess Ceprano in *Rigoletto*, Barbarina in *Figaro* and Kate Pinkerton in *Madama Butterfly*, and just as the young German artist with promise is then given a larger rôle, so Adèle Leigh was asked to sing Cherubino in *Figaro*. And what a delightful Cherubino she was! Probably the best post-war English interpreter of this part Covent Garden has heard. In 1949—50 season she succeeded Shirley Russell as Madeleine in Bliss's *The Olympians*.

By the 1951—52 season she had made great strides, and her first real test came in the exacting rôle of Pamina in *The Magic Flute*. This she sang with a sweetness of tone that came as a surprise to most people. She soon followed this rôle with Susanna in *Figaro*, and Sophie in *Der Rosenkavalier*. This latter part, with its high *tessitura* and soft top notes, was just right for her vocal equipment. She was, however, apt to be somewhat arch and a little self-conscious, and it took three or four years before she was able to overcome these weaknesses on the dramatic side of her performances.

Oscar in *Un Ballo in Maschera*, Marzelline in *Fidelio* and Micaëla in *Carmen* were added to her repertory, and as Anne in *Der Freischütz* she had another rôle that suited her voice and temperament. In February, 1955, she created the part of Bella in Tippet's *The Midsummer Marriage*. This is not the place to discuss the musical merits of this work, but the rôle of the hard-boiled typist in which Adèle Leigh was dressed in a creation worthy of Dior ensured for her another personal success. A few weeks later she was asked at very short notice to sing the title rôle of Manon in Massenet's opera, and once again she showed what a hard worker she is, and how natural is her sense of stage. She sang three other new rôles during the 1954—55 season—Esmeralda in *The Bartered Bride*, in which she displayed amazing comic talent, the Waldvogel in *Siegfried*, in which she was heard but not seen, and

Liù in *Turandot*. More recently she has sung Papagena in *The Magic Flute*, where once again her charm and comedy talents were displayed.

I have said that Adèle Leigh is a hard worker, and I can think of few singers who so assiduously attend opera performances and concerts in order not only to enjoy themselves, but to see what they can learn from other artists. Indeed it is most refreshing to find a singer who is so interested in what is going on in the operatic world. Her interests are not confined to music, for she has more than a superficial knowledge of modern art, and is an avid cinema-goer. If she were not an opera singer she could have made her career in musical comedy, or on the straight stage. Her dry humour and wit combine with her marvellous powers of mimicry to produce the most devastating parodies of operatic performances that she has witnessed.

RECORDINGS

There are no recordings of Adèle Leigh in the current catalogues.

ZINKA MILANOV

I DO NOT SUPPOSE that there can have been many sopranos in the history of opera who have been offered a contract for an engagement at a leading opera house which included two clauses, one stipulating that within three months she was to learn three rôles in Italian, and the other that she lose at least twenty-five pounds of weight. That is what happened in the case of Zinka Milanov in 1937, when, virtually an unknown singer, she was offered an engagement in New York.

Zinka Kunc was born in Zagreb in May, 1906, and it was under that name that she was known until the time of her American début. Her brother was a talented child pianist, and composed some two dozen songs for his sister's early recitals. At the age of four she began to study singing, and when she was eight sang *Carmen* at a home performance of that opera. At twelve her voice began to change from a mezzo to a soprano, and two years later she became a student at the Royal Music Academy in Zagreb. The following year she made her first concert appearance, and among those listening to her was Milka Ternina, one of the great Wagnerian singers of the early years of this century, and the first London and New York *Tosca*. She was enormously impressed by the young artist, and offered to coach her.

Three years of study with Ternina followed, and in October, 1927, she was ready for her début as Leonora (*Il Trovatore*) at the Ljubljana Opera. From 1928 to 1935 she was leading soprano at the Zagreb National Theatre and made guest appearances in Germany, Italy and Czechoslovakia. The turning point in this artist's career came in 1937, when she was invited by Toscanini to sing under his bâton in the Verdi *Requiem* at Salzburg. In the same year she married the Yugoslav actor Predrag Milanov, and from then onwards she sang under her married name. Her Salzburg appearances were followed by the contract from the Metropolitan Opera already mentioned, and on 17th December, 1937, she made her début there, again as Leonora in *Il Trovatore*.

Although the critics had to comment on a certain undependability as to pitch and on her imperfections as a vocalist, they all made allowances for the fact that she was singing her first rôle in Italian, and for the nervousness attendant on a Metropolitan début, and at the same time were able to remark on the translucent beauty of the voice, its power and the singer's inherent dramatic instinct. Milanov was able to overcome most of her vocal weaknesses in the course of the next ten years, during which time she studied in New York with Jacques Stueckgold; but even to-day she is not always the perfect vocalist, and an impeccable performance on one evening can be followed by an erratic one on the next.

Except for a break covering the 1948 and 1949 seasons, Milanov has been the leading dramatic soprano at the Metropolitan for nearly twenty years. There she



Sedge LeBl

Zinka Milanov



Sedge LeBlang

Milanov as *Amelia* in
'Un Ballo in Maschera'



Sedge LeBlang

Milanov as *Leonora* in
'La Forza del Destino'



Sedge LeBlang

Milanov as *Aida*



Elsie Morison
as *Mimi*

Houston Rogers

Elsie
Morison
at home



Houston Rogers



'Opera' Archives

Elisabeth Schwarzkopf



Edward Mandi

Schwarzkopf as *Fioletta*

Schwarzkopf as *Donna Elvira*



Foto Ellinger



Richardby

Irmgard Seefried as *Susanna* in 'Figaro'



Rudolf Pittner

Seefried as *Liù* in 'Turandot'

Irmgard Seefried at home





'Opera' Archives

Lily Pons as *Lucia*

has sung a wide variety of rôles, ranging from Donna Anna (*Don Giovanni*) to Santuzza (*Cavalleria Rusticana*), and from the title rôle in *Norma* to that of *La Gioconda*, but it is perhaps as a Verdi soprano that she is supreme to-day. While Tebaldi and Callas are both fine interpreters of parts like Leonora and Aïda, neither of these artists is a true *spinto* soprano. Milanov is, however, and when she sings Verdi's soaring phrases in *Un Ballo in Maschera*, *La Forza del Destino* and *Aida*, they sound as they must have done in the days of singers like Destin and Muzio.

Milanov sang for three seasons at the famous Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires, and there she appeared in a number of parts which she has not sung elsewhere: Madeleine de Coigny in *Andrea Chénier*, Rezia in *Oberon*, Maria in *Simone Boccanegra* and Desdemona in *Otello*. She has only made rare appearances in the great operatic centres of Europe; Vienna and Milan have heard her Tosca, but London unfortunately has only heard her in concerts, when she sang in the Verdi *Requiem* in 1938 and the Beethoven *Missa Solemnis* in the following year, on both occasions under Toscanini. The personality of this singer was perhaps best summed up in the publication "Opera News" as "half child, half woman, entirely prima donna".

RECORDINGS

Zinka Milanov has fortunately made an impressive number of recordings in which the full beauty of her voice has been captured. Besides her Santuzza in the complete *Cavalleria Rusticana* (HMV ALP 1126-8 and Victor LM 6106), Leonora in *Il Trovatore* (HMV ALP 1112-3 and Victor LM 6008) and *Aida* (RCA Victor, not yet released in Great Britain), there is the outstanding HMV ALP 1247 (Victor LM 1777), on which are collected the great soprano arias from *La Forza del Destino*, *Aida* and *Il Trovatore*, and the "Suicidio" from *La Gioconda*.

RICHARD WAGNER built Bayreuth so that he could have his operas sung and produced as he wanted them, and the tradition of Wagnerian acting there up to 1939 had changed very little since the beginning of the century. One had become accustomed to fat Brünnhildes and Isoldes and to seeing a series of semaphore signalling movements which purported to be acting. It was left to Wagner's grandsons, Wieland and Wolfgang, to bring about a revolution in Wagnerian acting in post-war Bayreuth, and one of the artists who has worked with the Wagners there since 1951 is Martha Mödl. Her whole approach to the rôles she interprets typifies the new ideas of operatic acting that are current to-day in Germany. These can be summed up briefly as the importance of acting before singing and an intensity in portraying the emotions that is rare on the operatic stage.

Martha Mödl was born in Nürnberg in 1912. She did not start her musical career until she was in her thirties, having spent most of her adult life as a secretary in a business house. She wished to take up an operatic career, and so while continuing to work during the day she studied at the local conservatory in her spare time. Her début was made as Azucena at Remscheid, a small town near Düsseldorf, in 1944. The following year she was engaged by the Düsseldorf opera as a mezzo-soprano, and made her début there as Dorabella in *Così fan tutte*. She remained a member of the Düsseldorf company until 1949, scoring notable successes as the Composer in *Ariadne*, Octavian, Klytemnestra in *Elektra*, Eboli in *Don Carlos*, Marie in *Wozzeck* and Carmen. It was as Carmen that she made her Covent Garden début during the 1949—50 season. During the same year she appeared in Berlin as Kundry and her success in this rôle probably led to her first Bayreuth engagement.

During the 1950—51 Berlin season she sang the part of Lady Macbeth. This rôle had a great tradition behind it in Berlin, where Sigrid Onegin's interpretation had set a standard which no-one had equalled until Mödl. It is a rôle that either a high mezzo-soprano or a dramatic soprano can sing, and it was a sort of stepping-stone so far as Mödl was concerned to the dramatic soprano repertory. In 1952 she sang her first Isolde at Bayreuth. Her Tristan was Ramon Vinay, and even now as I write I can vividly recollect the emotional impact of their scenes together. After Isolde the next step was naturally Brünnhilde, and Mödl to-day has taken the place of Frida Leider and Martha Fuchs as the German hochdramatische soprano.

Mödl returned to Great Britain in 1952, when she sang Leonore in *Fidelio* and Octavian at the Edinburgh Festival as a guest artist with the Hamburg company, and in 1955, when she was heard as Isolde with the Stuttgart company in London. Perhaps the greatest honour that has yet been accorded her was to be chosen to sing

Leonore at the opening performance of the rebuilt Vienna State Opera in November, 1955.

I have said that Mödl brings an intensity that is rare among singers to her interpretations. Although this has an invigorating effect on the audience, it also has its dangers, for after a series of performances such as those at Bayreuth the voice is apt to tire far more quickly than is the case with more restrained singers, and there follows a period of vocal uncertainty. However, Mödl's voice, with its warm and beautiful lower register—an inheritance from her mezzo-soprano days—is always at the service of this highly individual and intelligent singer.

RECORDINGS

Martha Mödl has taken part in a number of complete opera recordings. For HMV she has recorded *Fidelio*, in which she sings Leonore (ALP 1130-2 and Victor LHMV 700), and *Die Walküre*, in which she sings Brünnhilde (ALP 1257-61 and Victor LHMV 900); both these are conducted by Furtwängler; for Decca *Parsifal*, in which she sings Kundry (LXT 2651-6 and LL. 492-7)—this is a recording of the Bayreuth 1951 performance; for Cetra *Elektra*, in which she sings Klytemnestra (in U.S.A., Cetra 1209; not obtainable in Great Britain), and for Philips *Oedipus Rex*. Of her single discs Telefunken's TM 68009 on which she sings arias from *Orfée*, *Don Carlos* and Verdi's *Macbeth*, and LGX 66036—Isolde's "Narration" and "Curse" and the closing scene from *Götterdämmerung*—are especially recommended.

ELSIE MORISON

IN GREAT BRITAIN before the war, despite the fact that Sadler's Wells and the Carl Rosa opera companies were permanent institutions, few singers were able to pursue operatic careers, and so they turned to oratorio for their livelihood. In recent years, with the establishment of Covent Garden as a national opera house, a young singer can hope to make a stage career; but tradition dies hard, and quite often young artists find themselves even now torn between the world of opera and that of oratorio. Too often a promising voice is lost to the opera house when its possessor decides to make a concert career, and this was very nearly what happened in the case of Elsie Morison.

She was born in Ballarat, a town in Victoria, Australia. Until she was seventeen her musical studies were directed towards the piano, but at the same time her mother, who was herself a singer, was training her voice. In 1943 she won the Melba Scholarship, which took her to the Melbourne Conservatory for three years. There she studied with Clive Carey, with whom she was able to continue in England, where he was appointed professor at the Royal College of Music in 1946. Her first important public appearance was at the Melbourne Town Hall in 1944, where she sang in the *Messiah*, and during the next two years she was heard mostly in recitals, oratorios and broadcasts. In 1946 she came to England and studied for five terms at the Royal College. One of her fellow-students there was Kenneth Stevenson, the bass, to whom she is now married.

She made her first public appearance in England at the Albert Hall in February, 1948, in Handel's *Acis and Galatea*, and in the autumn of the same year she was invited to join the Sadler's Wells Opera Company. Her rôles during the first season at the Wells included the Dew Fairy in *Hansel and Gretel*, Mercedes in *Carmen*, Lauretta in *Gianni Schicchi*, Fiordiligi in *Così fan tutte* and the title rôle in Rimsky-Korsakov's *The Snow Maiden*. Even for a young beginner of Elsie Morison's attainments, it was something of an undertaking to sing such a taxing rôle as that of Fiordiligi in one's initial opera season. To-day she says that if she had known then as much about singing and opera as she does now, she would never have dared to sing that rôle when she did.

Her second year at Sadler's Wells brought repetitions of her first season's rôles, and the addition to her repertory of Nannetta in Verdi's *Falstaff*. In nearly a quarter of a century of opera-going I cannot recall a more charming interpreter of that part, and her ravishingly beautiful singing in the fairy music of the last act was an experience to treasure.

After two seasons at Sadler's Wells Elsie Morison began to sing more and more in oratorio throughout the country, and although she made a few appearances as

Susanna it looked as if she was deciding to give up opera entirely. In the summer of 1953 she was invited to sing the part of Anne Trulove with the Glyndebourne Opera in the British stage première of *The Rake's Progress* at the Edinburgh Festival, and shortly afterwards to create the title rôle in Arwel Hughes's *Menna* with the Welsh National Opera Company in Cardiff. She also made one or two broadcasts in operatic programmes, but she was still undecided in which direction her future lay. The author of this book is not a little proud that his own advice and influence had some small effect in making Elsie Morison decide to take the operatic road.

In the winter of 1953 she was asked to sing Mimì and Micaëla as a guest artist with the Covent Garden company, first in London and then on tour. From the very outset her Mimì was a touching creation, and the simplicity and sincerity she brought to that rôle have been repeated in all her operatic interpretations. In the summer of 1954 she sang Marzelline in *Fidelio* under Clemens Krauss, and there the value of her Handelian and Mozartian training combined with her unaffected stage presence to make that generally pale character into a real, living personage. The following year she was invited to become a permanent member of the Covent Garden ensemble, and to Mimì and Micaëla she added the rôle of Antonia in *The Tales of Hoffmann* and Marenka in *The Bartered Bride*.

This last rôle she sang in May, 1955, in the new production of that opera which served to introduce Rafael Kubelik to Covent Garden audiences. Her gifts as a singer and her musicianship appealed to Kubelik, and she was his choice for Pamina in the Mozart bi-centenary production of *The Magic Flute* in January, 1956. Glyndebourne has done her the honour of inviting her to sing Zerlina there during the summer of 1956, where she will be the first English artist to sing this rôle since the late Audrey Mildmay. The rapid artistic growth of Elsie Morison during the last two seasons has been a joy to watch; her voice, always sweet and well-placed, has taken on a new bloom and has increased in size, so that from becoming just a very good British singer she has emerged as an artist of international stature. One need no longer go abroad to look for one's Mimì.

Those virtues of sincerity and simplicity on the stage which I have mentioned, are carried over by Elsie Morison into her private life, and she adds to them a most charming nature. These are the qualities which have endeared her to her colleagues and to the opera public.

RECORDINGS

As well as singing Polly in the complete *Beggar's Opera* (HMV CLP 1051-2) and the soprano parts in *Messiah* Columbia 33CX 1146-48 (Angel 35123-5) and *Israel il Egypt* Columbia 34CY 1347-8, Elsie Morison has recorded for Oiseau-lyre, Arne's *Comus*, Monteverdi's *Vespers* and selections from Couperin and Lully.

LILY PONS

ON 4TH JANUARY, 1956, Lily Pons celebrated her Silver Jubilee at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York, singing her most famous part, that of Lucia in Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*. Born over fifty years ago, this chic, petite French artist not only retains her youthful looks, but also her youthful voice. A native of Cannes, she went to the Paris Conservatory when she was thirteen, and there studied to become a pianist. Although her piano studies were interrupted by ill-health, she was able to graduate towards the end of the First World War. She then played for wounded soldiers, and on one occasion was asked by one of them to sing; she did, and was such a success that she convinced Max Dearly, the Manager of the Théâtre des Variétés, that she was an experienced singer. She obtained an engagement from him and appeared in a number of musical shows. Soon Lily Pons decided to take some serious vocal lessons, and went to Alberto di Gorostiaga in Paris for that purpose.

She made her début at Mulhouse in the title rôle of *Lakmé*. After singing in various French provincial centres, she was heard by Maria Gay and her husband Giovanni Zenatello, who recommended her to Gatti-Casazza, Director of the Metropolitan Opera. She went to New York and for four months she worked, preparing her audition. Although at that time she only had a repertory of five operas, she was given a five-year contract at \$445 a week; to-day she gets \$1,000 a performance! Her New York début took place in November, 1930, in the title rôle of *Lucia di Lammermoor*, with Gigli, de Luca and Pinza. She recalls that when she stepped on to the Metropolitan stage for the first time she weighed exactly ninety-eight pounds. "It was a revolution", she says. "I was the first soprano of that size ever to sing at the Metropolitan."

Although not a *diva* in the sense that Melba, Tetrassini and Galli-Curci were, she most successfully took over the rôles that these artists had sung: rôles like Amina in *La Sonnambula*, Gilda, Adina and Rosina. It was as Rosina that she made her only Covent Garden appearances, during the 1935 international season, including one performance with the veteran de Luca as Figaro and Dino Borgioli as Almaviva. In 1938 she married the conductor André Kostelanetz, and with him and his orchestra she has given many concerts throughout the United States.

The part of *Lakmé* had a particular appeal for Lily Pons. She has made a detailed study of the Hindu background of this work, and had materials and jewelry for her costumes specially chosen for her in India. Another oriental rôle which she filled with great success was that of the Queen of Shemakhan in *Le Coq d'Or*. Constanze in *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* is another eastern part in which she is interested. It is not only oriental heroines, however, that fascinate Lily Pons, for when she was in Scotland shortly after the war she made a special point of visiting Stair House in

Ayrshire, the home of James and Margaret Dalrymple, the parents of the original Lucia, in order to steep herself in the background of the Donizetti opera. Comedy and tragedy come equally well to this singer, and in 1941 she sang the part of Marie in Donizetti's *La Fille du Régiment* at the Metropolitan, one of Jenny Lind's most famous rôles. In 1951 in San Francisco she attempted the part of Violetta for the first time. This was not the success she had hoped, and wisely she gave it up.

In a recent interview she has said that there are two more rôles she would like to sing; one she feels she most certainly will—that is Mélisande in the Debussy opera—and one she says she most certainly will not—that is the title rôle of *Carmen*.

Just as during the First World War the young conservatory student played the piano to entertain wounded soldiers, so during the last war she travelled far outside the United States to entertain the Allied troops in all parts of the world. For this and for her other musical work she is the proud possessor of the Légion d'Honneur and the Croix de Lorraine. At the gala performance to celebrate her twenty-fifth Metropolitan anniversary she was presented with many gifts from fellow-artists, and a silver bowl from the Metropolitan Opera Guild, inscribed with the words: "il dolce suono ci colpirà sempre di tua voca"—a graceful variation of the opening passage of the mad scene from *Lucia di Lammermoor*.

RECORDINGS

There is now little of Lily Pons in the English catalogues. On Columbia LX 940 and Angel 71643D there is an example of one of her best rôles, Lakmé—The Bell Song. In the American catalogues much remains including several recordings made with her husband, André Kostelanetz.

ELISABETH SCHWARZKOPF

ELISABETH SCHWARZKOPF has been called the greatest German singer of our time. Now this is a very sweeping statement to make about any artist, for in the first place one is not told whether it is as an opera singer or lieder singer that Madame Schwarzkopf is supreme. But let me say at the outset that whatever opinions there may be about Madame Schwarzkopf's voice as such, I do not think anyone will deny that as an artist and musician she does stand out from among her contemporaries.

Schwarzkopf was born in Posen. She received her early musical training at the Berlin Hochschule für Musik, where her first singing teacher was Lula Mysz-Gmeiner. Herself a contralto and lieder singer, she decided that Schwarzkopf was also a contralto and trained her accordingly. After two and a half years with this teacher she transferred to Dr. Egenolf, through whom she got her first engagement at the Städtische Oper in Berlin. In 1938 she made her début as a Flower-Maiden in *Parsifal*, and during her first two seasons in Berlin she sang many small rôles, including the First Boy in *Die Zauberflöte*, Esmeralda in *The Bartered Bride*, the Waldvogel in *Siegfried* and Valencienne in *Die lustige Witwe*. From 1941 she began to assume larger rôles; Oscar (*Un Ballo in Maschera*), Musetta, Lauretta (*Gianni Schicchi*) and Zerbinetta (*Ariadne auf Naxos*). Schwarzkopf's singing of this last rôle brought her to the attention of Maria Ivogün, the Hungarian coloratura soprano, who had herself been the outstanding Zerbinetta of the 1920's, and she took on Schwarzkopf as her pupil. Ivogün's husband, Michael Raucheisen, one of the finest accompanists in Germany, played a great part in Schwarzkopf's development as a lieder singer.

In 1942 she was invited to appear as a guest artist with the Vienna State Opera, and in 1944 she was engaged as leading coloratura soprano in Vienna. There she sang Rosina, Blondchen (*Die Entführung aus dem Serail*), Zerbinetta and Musetta. After the liberation of Vienna, Schwarzkopf sang with the State Opera until the end of the 1949 season. Besides the rôles already mentioned, she was heard as Constanze, Donna Elvira, Pamina, Violetta, Gilda, Mimì, Liù and Sophie.

London first heard her on the opening night of the Vienna Opera's autumn season in 1947, when her aristocratic and beautifully sung Donna Elvira showed that Germany was still able to produce first-rate operatic artists. A few days later she sang Marzelline in *Fidelio* with great charm. She repeated this rôle in London on a number of subsequent occasions, including the 1951 performances with Kirsten Flagstad. From 1948 to 1951 Schwarzkopf was a permanent member of the Covent Garden Opera Company, singing a number of the rôles in which she already was famous in Vienna, and adding to her repertory the parts of Manon, Cio-Cio-San and Eva. With the exception of Eva, which she sang in German, she sang all her rôles in excellent English.



'Opera' Archives

Eleanor Steber as *Donna Elvira*
in 'Don Giovanni'



Erio Piccagliani

Renata Tebaldi at home



Tebaldi
as
Desdemona

Sedge LeBlang

Tebaldi as *Olimpia*
in Spontini's opera of that name

Foto Locca



Tebaldi as *Amazily*
in Spontini's 'Fernand Cort

Foto Troi





Sedge LeBlang

Astoria Woman on Santa in 'Drama' - 1911 - 1912





Fayer

Ljuba Welitsch as *Salome*



Welitsch
as
Tosca

Hans Dietrich

Ljuba Welitsch





Amy Shuard
as
Katya Kabanova

Angus McBean

Amy Shuard
at home



Some of Schwarzkopf's finest work has been in collaboration with Herbert von Karajan, with whom she first sang at the Salzburg Festival of 1948 as the Countess in *Figaro*. Karajan, who both produced and conducted the work, took the Salzburg cast to the Scala in Milan the following winter, and since then both he and Schwarzkopf have appeared regularly at the leading Italian opera house. There she has sung Elisabeth in *Tannhäuser*, Donna Elvira, the Marschallin, Elsa in *Lohengrin*, Mélisande (under de Sabata), Marguerite (*Faust*) and Pamina. At the Venice Festival of 1951 Schwarzkopf created the part of Anne Trulove in the first performance of Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress*.

America did not hear Schwarzkopf in opera until the autumn of 1955, when she appeared in San Francisco as the Marschallin and Donna Elvira. In December of that year the Scala, Milan, opened a chamber opera house inside the larger theatre—La Piccola Scala—and there for the Mozart celebrations she sang Fiordiligi for the first time on any stage, although she had recorded this rôle some twelve months previously.

Schwarzkopf is married to Walter Legge, whose intimate knowledge of Hugo Wolf and general approach to lieder singing have been of great help to her in her concert career. She is essentially a very serious artist, and the attention she pays to the texts and the nuances of meaning which she gives to words and phrases are the hall-marks of a really great lieder singer.

RECORDINGS

Elisabeth Schwarzkopf's recordings cover a wide range, consisting as they do of opera, operetta, oratorio and lieder. She has taken part in the complete performances of *Hänsel und Gretel* (Columbia 33CX 1096-7 and Angel 35049-50), *Le Nozze di Figaro* (33CX 1007-9 and Columbia ML 4443-5), *Così fan tutte* (33CX 1262-4 and Angel 35164-6), the Bayreuth *Die Meistersinger* (33CX 1021-5) and *Ariadne auf Naxos* (33CX 1292-4 and Angel 35222-4). The *Così fan tutte* and *Ariadne* are highly recommended. In the lighter vein her performances of Hanna in *Die lustige Witwe* (33CX 1051-2 and Angel 35033-4) and Rosalinde in *Die Fledermaus* (33CX 1299-1301 and Angel 35210-2) are sheer whipped cream. Of her single discs the closing scene from *Capriccio* and the Strauss Four Last Songs on 33CX 1107 (Angel 35084), the lieder recital with Gerald Moore on 33CX 1044 (Angel 35023) and the Highlights from *Arabella* (Columbia 33CX 1226 ad Angel 35194), are also strongly recommended.

IRMGARD SEEFRIED

IN MY APPRECIATION of Sena Jurinac I mentioned that when the Vienna company paid its first post-war visit to London we were introduced to four sopranos who bid fair to take the place of Lehmann, Leider, Reinhardt and Schumann. These are Jurinac, Welitsch, Schwarzkopf and Seefried.

Like Elisabeth Schumann, Seefried has come to be associated with Vienna, although not of Viennese birth. She was born in the Bavarian town of Koengetried, in October, 1919. Her father was a school-teacher, and taught her the rudiments of music from the age of five, but when she was seventeen he unfortunately died. Her family was hit by a double tragedy, for her only sister also died, and her mother was not willing for her other daughter to follow a musical career. However, young Irmgard Seefried had been able to complete a six-months course of study at the Augsburg Conservatory. "At that time everyone was against me", she says. "I could hardly read a note of music; I could play the violin by ear, but had no immediate hope of earning my living by singing." However her teacher, Professor Meyer, had faith in her, and she was able to continue her studies under his guidance without her mother's knowledge. She was able to earn a little money by singing at parties and receptions, and finally was chosen to sing a solo part at a student concert. She did not know that her mother was in the audience, and was surprised when after the concert she found her among those who had come to congratulate her.

After leaving the Conservatory in 1938 she obtained an engagement at the Opera House at Aachen, where another young artist was beginning his career. This was the conductor Herbert von Karajan. She made her début as the Priestess in *Aida*, following it by Nuri in d'Albert's *Tiefland*. She remained at Aachen for three years, working with Karajan and singing Agathe (*Der Freischütz*), Nannetta (*Falstaff*), Mařenka, Pamina and Susanna. An invitation to Dresden followed in 1943, but at the same time the offer of a full contract with the Vienna State Opera was forthcoming, and she joined that company, making her début there as Eva under Karl Böhm, with Paul Schoeffler as Hans Sachs.

During her second season in Vienna Seefried was chosen to sing the rôle of the Composer in *Ariadne auf Naxos* during the eightieth birthday celebrations of Richard Strauss. By the end of the 1946 season her repertory had grown to include Fiordiligi, Susanna, Marzelline, the three soprano rôles in *Hoffmann*, Nedda and Cio-Cio-San. In 1946, too, she married the violinist Wolfgang Schneiderhan, who was at that time the leader of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra. The following year Seefried came to London with the Vienna company, making her début on the second night of the season as Fiordiligi, and following this up with Susanna in *Le Nozze di Figaro*.

Seefried has a particular affection for the Salzburg Festival, and has sung there every year since its resumption after the war. There she has been heard as Pamina, Zerlina and in other Mozart rôles, and in 1954 as the Composer in *Ariadne*.

One does not often find an opera singer who is also an accomplished concert artist and lieder singer, but Seefried is just as much at home on the concert platform as on the opera stage, and as an interpreter of Hugo Wolf she has few equals to-day. Off-stage she is the complete antithesis of what one generally supposes a prima donna to be; in fact she says that she dislikes that term being used about her. She sings because she likes singing and she sings to give pleasure to her listeners. She is completely devoted to her small daughter, Barbara, and because she loves her home life so much she often refuses long contracts which would take her away from Vienna.

Not very long ago the Mozart Association of Salzburg awarded her the Lilli Lehmann Medal. She feels more pride in having been accorded this honour than in any ovations she has received from audiences throughout her career; for Seefried, like that fabulous singer, is herself a great artist, and a great singer who has dedicated her life to music. Happy in herself, she makes all her listeners happy too.

RECORDINGS

Irmgard Seefried has an impressive list of recordings to her name, both in the Columbia and Deutsche Grammophon catalogues. For Columbia she has recorded Susanna in the complete *Nozze di Figaro* (33CX 1007-9 and ML 4443-5) and Pamina in the complete *Zauberflöte* (33CX 1015-5 and ML 4446-8), both under Karajan. Although Seefried's own contributions to these sets reach a high level of interpretation, the recordings cannot be recommended owing to the over-fast tempi of the conductor and the complete absence of recitatives and dialogue. Far more satisfactory is her performance of the Composer in Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos*, also conducted by Karajan, on 33CX 1292-4. Also recommended are her *Hänsel und Gretel* duets with Elisabeth Schwarzkopf on LX 1036-7 and Angel 3506, and her truly outstanding Hugo Wolf recital on Deutsche Grammophon 18192 and Decca 9743. (It is interesting to note that she has also sung the rôle of Marzelline in a complete *Fidelio* for Vox, but this is now virtually unobtainable.)

AMY SHUARD

“THIS PERFORMANCE OF *Faust* had the added pleasure, indeed thrill, of introducing to this listener a young soprano in the rôle of Marguerite who should, if carefully nurtured, become in the next five years or so the finest dramatic soprano in England since Eva Turner. This gold-mine is Amy Shuard, a twenty-five year old girl whose only previous operatic experience was in South Africa. She possesses a truly thrilling voice of the kind that becomes fuller and more powerful in its upper reaches; the tone is round and vibrant, and the stronger support which the lower portion of the voice still needs will no doubt soon come. In addition she has a charming stage presence and a natural acting ability.”

These words are mine, and appeared in *OPERA* in April, 1950. Now, nearly six years later, Amy Shuard is a member of the Covent Garden Opera Company, and there she has already been heard as Aida, Butterfly, Giulietta in *Hoffmann* and Freia and Gerhilde in the *Ring*; she has been acclaimed at Sadler's Wells for her powerfully sung and acted Katya Kabanova and Magda Sorel in *The Consul*; and in the not too distant future she will probably have been heard as Jenufa and Amelia in *Un Ballo in Maschera*. In other words, my prophecy has come true; and that is always gratifying!

Amy Shuard was born in London in July, 1924. Her musical education was at the Trinity College of Music, where she studied voice under Ivor Warren. In 1948 she won the medal awarded by the Worshipful Company of Musicians, and then went to South Africa to represent the college in a lecture and concert tour. The result of this was so successful that she was invited back to South Africa the following summer to sing with a company that was touring the Union, as Aida, Venus in *Tannhäuser* and Giulietta in *Hoffmann*. While in South Africa she met a young medical student, Peter Asher, who subsequently came to this country, and in 1954 they were married.

On her return from South Africa Shuard gave an audition at Sadler's Wells, and was immediately engaged. Her début was made there in November, 1949, as Musetta. During her first season she also sang Marguerite, Santuzza and, during the company's provincial tour, Carmen.

It was during the following season that she really showed her mettle, when she sang the rôle of the Princess Eboli in *Don Carlos*, Sadler's Wells' contribution to the 1951 Verdi celebrations. This rôle is generally sung by a mezzo-soprano like Stignani, but Shuard gave the most exciting vocal and dramatic performance on the stage in that production, and in “O don fatale” displayed the real grand manner, which earned her an ovation.

During the same season she was heard in another Verdi rôle, Amelia Boccanegra, and in the title rôle of Janáček's *Katya Kabanova* which, as the Earl of Harewood pointed out, needs both intensity and experience; the former she provided but the latter at that stage of her career she naturally did not possess.

In the course of the next two seasons she added the rôles of Nedda, Giorgetta (*Il Tabarro*) and Butterfly to her repertory. Then at the end of the 1953—54 season she went to Milan for a period of study.

Her return early in January, 1954, when she sang Butterfly at Sadler's Wells, found her voice fuller, more vibrant and more thrilling than ever, though one noticed a lack of support in the middle of her register, and an inability to project her soft tones so that they carried.

Now one of Amy Shuard's great assets is that she is never satisfied with herself, and that she does listen to advice and criticism. And so she knew that she still had some hard work to put in before her vocal production was really all it could be; and work she did. Another of this singer's greatest assets is that although she is naturally ambitious, she never attempts things before she feels she is ready for them, and so although Covent Garden invited her to join them on a number of occasions, it was not until the 1954—55 season that she began to sing with the company, first as a guest, and then in the autumn of 1955 as a member of the permanent company.

During the latter part of the 1953—54 season there was a revival of *Katya Kabanova* under the direction of Rafael Kubelik at Sadler's Wells, and by this time Shuard had acquired that further experience that she had lacked three years previously; this, together with the inspiration she drew from the conductor, enabled her to give the finest performance of her career; a wholly integrated study, in which singing and acting were all of a piece. Never before had she been so much inside a rôle dramatically, and vocally she poured forth a wonderful stream of sound. In the following year she scored a similar triumph as Magda Sorel in Menotti's *The Consul*, literally stopping the show after her great scene in the second act.

At Covent Garden her *Aida* was a success, and her Freia in *Rheingold* held the promise of perhaps a Sieglinde or even Brünnhilde in another six or seven years; while her re-studied Butterfly under the direction of Rudolf Kempe was one of the most moving performances of this part heard in recent years.

Off-stage Shuard is blunt and outspoken, with a droll sense of humour and a placid disposition. In a little less than five years she has come a very long way, and when one remembers that she is not yet thirty-five one is entitled to get very excited about the future. Someone has to, for Shuard herself refuses to be ruffled in the slightest.

RECORDINGS

There are no recordings of Amy Shuard in the current catalogues.

ELEANOR STEBER

FOR MANY YEARS the Sherwin-Williams Company sponsored a series of weekly broadcasts over the NBC network, known as "The Metropolitan Auditions of the Air". In this series the winners each year were offered contracts at the Metropolitan, and since the inception of these auditions the world of opera has discovered many talented young artists, amongst them singers like Arthur Carron, Leonard Warren, Margaret Harshaw and Eleanor Steber, who have since achieved international fame.

Eleanor Steber was born in July, 1916, in Wheeling, West Virginia. Determined since her youngest days to become an opera singer, she gained a scholarship to the New England Conservatory at Boston, where she worked very hard, earning a few dollars by playing the piano at a dancing school and singing in oratorio performances in Boston and the surrounding district. Each year the Metropolitan Opera visited Boston on its spring tour, and on one of these visits she was signed on to appear as a super in one production. When she arrived at the stage door on the evening of the performance, to her dismay she discovered that another, unknown young lady had signed in as Eleanor Steber, and so her eagerly awaited début with the Metropolitan while still studying never came off!

In 1940 she settled in New York, and prepared for the radio audition in the spring of that year. As a result of it she won a contract for the 1940—41 season at the Metropolitan, and made her début on 8th December, 1940, as Sophie in *Der Rosenkavalier*. She received "rave" notices in the New York press; here is a typical one that appeared in "The New York Times": "... a Sophie, fresh and delicate. She sang all Sophie's high notes in the 'Presentation of the silver rose' scene without a tremor or a deviation from pitch". Her only other rôle in her début year was Micaëla in *Carmen*. During the next few seasons her repertory slowly enlarged, and by the end of the war it included the Countess Almaviva, Donna Elvira, Marguerite, Antonia and Giulietta in *Tales of Hoffmann*, Violetta, Alice Ford in *Falstaff* and Eva in *Die Meistersinger*. In less than ten years after her début as Sophie in *Der Rosenkavalier* she was singing the rôle of the Marschallin in the same opera.

Gradually giving up her lighter rôles, she assumed parts like Elizabeth de Valois in *Don Carlos*, Desdemona in *Otello* and Fiordiligi in *Così fan tutte*. On one occasion at the Metropolitan she sang these last two rôles on the very same day—Desdemona at a matinée and Fiordiligi in the evening. As one critic remarked: "It is doubtful whether any prima donna has ever sung in one day two rôles so taxing and so utterly different in their requirements of vocal technique and voice placement".

Eleanor Steber's European début was at the 1947 Edinburgh Festival, when she was heard as the Countess in *Figaro*. Six years later she appeared at another European

festival—Bayreuth—where she sang Elsa in *Lohengrin*. On that occasion there were two American artists in the cast, for Astrid Varnay was the Ortrud. One of her greatest successes was at the Florence Festival in 1954, when she sang Minnie in *La Fanciulla del West*. For this opera she specially learned to ride a horse.

During the 1954—55 Metropolitan season Steber sang the rôle of Arabella in the first performance in New York of Strauss's opera. This rôle she sang in English, and it was one which appealed to her personally. After the 1954—55 New York season, she embarked on a tour of Yugoslavia, singing in *Tosca*, *Traviata* and *Faust* in their original languages. As all operas in Yugoslavia are sung in Serbo-Croatian, and no change of this rule was made even for so eminent a guest artist, she says that there was often some confusion on the stage, especially as she had no rehearsals. Another exciting experience for Steber was her appearance in Athens in *Idomeneo* at the first International Festival of Music and Drama held there later last summer.

Still under forty, Steber has many years of singing before her, and because she is a fine vocalist and a serious artist, dependable and versatile, she will undoubtedly be heard a lot more in the opera houses of the world.

RECORDINGS

Eleanor Steber has made a number of records for American Columbia, but few are available in Europe. This is unfortunate for the European opera lover, because her performance as Fiordiligi in *Così fan tutte* (Columbia SL 122), which I have heard, is a very good one. She also sings Cio-Cio-San in a complete *Madama Butterfly* (SL 104). Of her recordings that are available the highlights from *Otello* (5 ML 4499), with Ramon Vinay and Frank Guarrera on Philips ABL 3005 give a very good idea of this singer's accomplishments. On Decca LXT 2880-4 and London LLX 16 she sings the part of Elsa in the complete Bayreuth recording of *Lohengrin*.

IT IS ALWAYS particularly satisfying when a personal "hunch" about a singer proves right. When you hear a new voice for the first time, and you realise that this is a voice about which nearly everybody will soon be talking; and then when a year or so later you find that the possessor of that voice has taken her place among the great singers of the day, one is entitled to feel rather proud of one's initial judgment.

This is what has happened in the case of Renata Tebaldi. I first heard this soprano's voice on the night of 11th May, 1946—the famous evening when La Scala, Milan, re-opened and Toscanini conducted a programme of music by Italian composers. On that occasion Tebaldi sang in the "Preghiera" from Rossini's *Mosé*. A few months later I heard her as Elsa in *Lohengrin* in a broadcast from Bologna, when her pure, beautiful tone literally made my spine tingle. Even now I can still recollect the melting loveliness of her Desdemona with the veteran Francesco Merli as Otello in Rome during the 1947—48 season.

In the very first article on post-war opera in Italy that I contributed in January, 1949, to *BALLET AND OPERA* (the predecessor of the monthly magazine *OPERA*), I wrote:

"The protagonist in this opera (Casavola's *Salombó* in Rome) was the young Italian lirico-spinto, Renata Tebaldi, whose most beautiful voice I have greatly admired in such rôles as Desdemona, Margherita and Elsa, and who should be heard in London".

It was to be another eighteen months before British audiences were able to hear Tebaldi; she came first to Edinburgh for the Festival in 1950, to sing in the Verdi *Requiem* with the Scala company; and then a week or so later London heard her as Desdemona, and in the Verdi *Requiem* under De Sabata at Covent Garden, again with the Scala ensemble.

Renata Tebaldi was born in Pesaro on 1st February, 1922. She was brought up in Parma, where she studied to be a pianist. When she was seventeen her piano teacher heard her sing, and advised her to enter for a singing course at the Parma Conservatory, where she became a pupil of the famous soprano, Carmen Melis. Owing to the bombing the Conservatory had to close, and Tebaldi left in 1944 before obtaining her diploma. On 23rd May of that year she made her début at Rovigo as Helen of Troy in Boito's *Mefistofele*. There followed appearances in the Italian provinces and Trieste, and then came the invitation from Toscanini to participate in the re-opening of La Scala. Up to the end of the 1954—55 season she had sung there every year, and twice—in 1950 and 1953—she has had the honour of opening the season; on the first occasion as Desdemona, on the second in the title rôle of Catalani's *La Wally*.

At the San Carlo, Naples, she is if anything more popular than in Milan, and there she receives the kind of ovations that must have been reserved for the divas of old; roses and other flowers being showered down to her from the boxes and galleries. It was at Naples during the Verdi celebrations of 1951 that she gave the first performance for more than a century of that composer's *Giovanna d'Arco*, and subsequently she and the entire Naples cast were invited to sing the same rôles at the Paris Opéra.

It would be impossible to name all the great opera houses that have acclaimed her, and merely boring to list all the parts she has sung; but a few should be mentioned. At the Florence Festivals of 1949 and 1950 she took part in two outstanding revivals; Rossini's *L'Assedio di Corinto*, in which she sang Pamira, and Spontini's *Olimpia*, in which she sang the title part. Of her Rossini performance the Earl of Harewood was constrained to write: "Italy has at least one great singer in her midst". At the old Roman theatre at Pompei she sang Cleopatra in Handel's *Giulio Cesare*, and at Naples she appeared as Amazily in Spontini's rarely performed *Fernando Cortez*.

London and New York have acclaimed her Desdemona and Tosca, and South America has gone into ecstasies over her Violetta, where her singing has been compared with that of the famous Muzio.

What is there about Tebaldi's voice that has made her one of the most sought after and popular of contemporary singers? In the first place—and I do not think anyone will want to deny this—she possesses one of the most glorious vocal organs to have come out of Italy this century. Most of the Italian sopranos of the inter-war years sang too loudly, with a superabundance of chest tones and complete lack of legato. And not one displayed the beautiful mezza-voce that Tebaldi possesses. She sings with an elegance and style that is rare among present-day artists; and she really lives and suffers the character she is portraying.

"La Tebaldi" is already a legend. The outstanding lyric-dramatic soprano of the present generation.

RECORDINGS

Of this singer's many recordings, the series of complete operas she has made for Decca are not all first-class. Most of the soprano's own work in them is outstandingly good, but often she is supported by less than first-rate artists and conductors. Thus her exquisite and tender Desdemona is spoilt by of the unsympathetic conducting, and by the loud and unsubtle protagonist. Her performances in the complete *Madama Butterfly* (Decca LXT 2638-40 and London LLA 8), *La Bohème* (Decca LXT 2622-3 and London LL 4662-3), *Manon Lescaut* (Decca LXT 2995-7 and London LLA 28) and *Tosca* (Decca LXT 2730-31 and London LL 660-1) all have much in them to enjoy. If one does not want a whole Tebaldi opera in the cases where the rest of the performances are somewhat disappointing, then Decca LXT 5076 (London LL 1255) which contains the important soprano excerpts from *Bohème*, *Butterfly*, *Aida*, *Manon Lescaut*, *Traviata* and *Otello* is specially recommended.

ASTRID VARNAY

I DO NOT SUPPOSE that there can have been many sopranos in operatic history who made their début at a few hours' notice in the rôle of Sieglinde, never having appeared before on any operatic stage. If that were not nerve-racking enough, to know that one was substituting for the indisposed Lotte Lehmann could not have made things really easy. That was on 6th December, 1941, at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York. The performance was broadcast throughout America and the singer appeared naturally without a rehearsal of any kind. Six days later the same artist was called on to sing the rôle of Brünnhilde, again at a few hours' notice, this time as a substitute for Helen Traubel. Americans call this "pinch-hitting", and Madame Varnay was a "pinch-hitter" on quite a number of occasions in the first few years of her operatic career.

She was born in Stockholm in 1918. Her mother, Maria Yavor, was a coloratura soprano, and her father a stage director and producer, who helped to launch the first opera company in Oslo. From the age of five years onwards she spent most of her time in America. She began to study music with a view to becoming a pianist, and for eight years attended the New Jersey Musical College, at the same time carrying on her formal education at William Dickinson High School. In 1937 she took her first job, a non-musical one, and in her spare time began to practise vocal exercises with her mother. Deciding that she wanted to make a professional career as a singer, she took her courage in both hands and sent a letter to Herman Weigert, then one of the musical staff of the Metropolitan Opera, asking for an audition. Weigert, who was a former professor of music at the Berlin Hochschule, was impressed by her voice, and took her along to sing to Georg Szell. He was equally enthusiastic, and the next person for whom she sang was Edward Johnson, the Director of the Opera House. Weigert continued to coach the young singer, and in 1941 she was offered a contract at the Metropolitan. In 1944 the pupil married her teacher.

Varnay's extraordinary début and singing of Brünnhilde less than a week later were followed during her first season by appearances as Elsa and Elisabeth. She also created the rôle of Telea in the première of Menotti's *The Island God*. During the next five years she was heard in most of the Wagnerian repertory, adding the parts of Kundry, Ortrud, Gutrune and Isolde to her other rôles. Her first appearances outside the United States came in 1946, when she sang Isolde and Brünnhilde in Rio de Janeiro, and the following year in Mexico City and Buenos Aires, when she sang Brünnhilde in a complete *Ring* cycle. The Italian repertory had always appealed to her, and she spent much time in learning a number of Italian dramatic rôles, including La Gioconda, Aida, Tosca and Santuzza, which she sang for the first time in Mexico in 1948.

The reports and criticisms that had reached London about her were enthusiastic, but knowledge of this artist was confined to those few people who read American musical papers, and to the inevitable concert agents. So it was with much pleasure that one heard her name announced at a press conference at the Royal Opera House in the autumn of 1948, as being the Brünnhilde and Isolde for a series of Wagnerian performances due to take place in November of that year. To sing Isolde at Covent Garden after Flagstad was yet another challenge to this young artist, but one which she faced with courage, because the great Norwegian soprano had always been a source of inspiration to her.

In 1951 she returned to Europe to sing Lady Macbeth at the Florence Festival, after which she came back to Covent Garden to sing the title rôles in *Salome* and *Aida*, and Leonora in *Il Trovatore*. She also took part in an unforgettable performance of *Die Walküre*, in which she sang Brünnhilde to Flagstad's Sieglinde. A month or two later saw her at Bayreuth, where she has shared the leading soprano rôles with Martha Mödl ever since. Munich is another European centre for which Varnay has a special affection, for it was there that she sang her first *Fidelio* in 1952.

Like her German colleagues, Varnay's approach to her rôles is most serious. She too is one of those artists who insists on reading as much background literature as possible before attempting a new part. She considers the words as important as the music, and this was especially noticeable in her reading of the rôles of Brünnhilde and Isolde. Of the latter Ernest Newman wrote that "it was all in all one of the best sung and acted Isolde's that I have ever seen". Indeed Varnay's acting is a perfect example of what operatic acting should be. She does not employ meaningless gestures, but lets her actions grow from the meaning of the words she is singing. Naturally graceful, and moving on the stage with great ease, I doubt whether any *Siegfried* Brünnhilde has ever awoken so beautifully to greet the sun.

Off-stage Astrid Varnay and her husband, whose death last year came as a tragic blow to her, loved nothing better than to explore the lesser-known parts of the many European cities they visited. Not for them were taxicabs, but they would make their own way around, exploring the little side-streets of London, and often astounding the native Londoner with their knowledge of his city. Their sense of humour and store of anecdotes made a luncheon date with them extend until almost tea-time; and if Madame Varnay could add the rôle of an authoress to that of an opera singer, I feel sure she would have much that is entertaining and instructive to divulge.

RECORDINGS

Astrid Varnay's recordings include her performances of Ortrud and Senta in the complete Bayreuth recordings of *Lohengrin* and *Der fliegende Holländer* (English Decca LXT 2880-4 and LXT 5150-2, London LLA 16 and LL 925/9). There is also a recording of the third act of *Die Walküre*, made at the first post-war Bayreuth Festival in 1951, in which Varnay sings Brünnhilde (English Columbia 33CX 1003-6, American Columbia SL 116). While her Decca performances, especially Ortrud,

can be highly recommended, *Die Walküre* did not find this artist in particularly steady voice.

Of the single discs that she recorded for Columbia, her Isolde's "Liebestod" (Columbia LX 1417) is recommended. She has recently signed a contract with Deutsche Grammophon, and although at the time of writing none of the discs she has made for this company are available in Great Britain and the United States, I list some of the more outstanding which I have heard: "Heil dir Sonne!" and the closing duet from *Siegfried* with Wolfgang Windgassen, and the closing scene from *Götterdämmerung* can be heard on DG 19045. DG 19018 contains Isolde's "Narration", and other *Tristan* extracts with Herta Töpper, Margarete Klose, Wolfgang Windgassen and Kim Borg.

LJUBA WELITSCH

WHO WILL EVER FORGET the first performance of *Salome* by the Vienna State Opera Company at Covent Garden in the autumn of 1947? Within a few minutes of the rise of the curtain Salome makes her entrance; and running down a ramp from the side of the stage came a striking figure with flaming red hair, who almost before she had sung a note had the audience in the palm of her hand. One immediately felt that here was a personality, and as I have suggested elsewhere in this book, star personalities are virtually the life-blood of opera.

Welitsch was born in Varna, a small town on the Bulgarian coast of the Black Sea, in July, 1913. Until she was fourteen she had no intention of becoming a singer, and her musical studies were directed towards the violin, for she had been given one as a present by her sister, when quite a small girl. She then went to the Sofia University with the intention of studying philosophy, but only remained there for four terms. During that period she was having private singing lessons. One day when rather short of money, but full of determination, she decided to ask the Director of the State Opera House in Sofia for an engagement. She asked the stage-door-keeper whether she could see the Director, and was told he was not in. Just like in any story, at that very moment the Director walked up, and young Welitsch (she was only eighteen at that time) went straight up to him and asked: "Will you give me a job?" The Director replied: "How can I employ you? I do not even know if you can sing"; to which Welitsch answered: "I will sing for you at once". She sang and was engaged.

Her début took place in 1936 in a minor rôle in Charpentier's *Louise*, and the following year she was engaged by the Opera House at Graz, making her début there as Nedda. She remained a member of the Graz ensemble until the outbreak of the war, and her rôles there included Hänsel, Manon Lescaut, Mimì, Cio-Cio-San, Barbarina, Cherubino and Susanna in *Figaro*, and Fiordiligi in *Così fan tutte*. During the first two years she spent in Graz the Director of the Opera House was Karl Rankl, under whom she was to sing some ten years later at Covent Garden.

Welitsch's musical education was completed in Vienna, where she worked at the Academy under Professor Lierhammer. She somehow also found time to acquire a Ph.D.

From 1941 to 1943 she sang in Hamburg and Berlin, and from 1943 to 1946 sang regularly with the Munich State Opera under Clemens Krauss. While at Munich she received an invitation to appear as a guest artist at the Vienna State Opera. There she appeared as the Composer in *Ariadne auf Naxos*. Strauss heard her in this part, and helped her to prepare the title rôle of *Salome*, in which she was heard for the

first time at a performance conducted by the composer on his eightieth birthday. In 1946 she joined the Vienna company and has been a member of the ensemble there ever since. The number of new rôles in which she has been heard in Vienna during the last ten years is enormous, and includes Jenufa, Nadya in Salmhofer's *Ivan Tarassenko*, Tatiana (*Eugene Onegin*), Donna Anna, Tosca and Minnie (*La Fanciulla del West*). In these last two Puccini rôles she enjoyed a success in Vienna not unlike that of her famous predecessor Maria Jeritza, whose colourful and flamboyant character enlivened not only the Vienna opera stage, but that of the other cities in which she appeared. There is something of the same colourful personality in Welitsch's character too.

After Welitsch's great success as Salome at Covent Garden in 1947, she was invited to sing Aïda, Musetta and Salome there in English the following year. The Aïda she sang with a silvery tone but with some musical liberties. The Musetta caused one of the greatest furores heard at post-war Covent Garden; so much so that "The Times" protested that her singing was too exciting for the rôle, and rapped the audience severely over the knuckles for daring to break into applause after Musetta's waltz song. Evidently "The Times" still holds that we should listen to our opera in a puritanical frame of mind. The *Salome*, too, had serious repercussions, but these had nothing to do with the prima donna's wonderful singing and acting of the title rôle, but were caused by the fantastic scenery of Salvador Dali and the very untraditional production of Peter Brook. Welitsch has returned on a number of occasions to London, and has also been heard as Tosca and Lisa in *The Queen of Spades*.

With the Glyndebourne Opera at the Edinburgh Festivals of 1948 and 1949 she sang an exciting Donna Anna, and a most moving Amelia in *Un Ballo in Maschera*. I doubt whether any artist since Frida Leider has been able to sing Anna's "Vengeance" aria with such a fiery intensity and almost steely tone as Welitsch.

Welitsch's American début took place at the Metropolitan Opera during the 1948—49 season. She remained there for four years, and besides repeating her European successes as Salome, Aïda, Tosca and Donna Anna, was heard as Rosalinda in an English version of Johann Strauss's *Die Fledermaus*.

Welitsch, rather like Callas, is a true prima donna. Everything she does is on the large scale. She is excitable, full of fun and, like so many other singers, fond of good food and wine. In Vienna she lives in an apartment overlooking the Rathausplatz, and the other occupants of her home include a canary and her two black poodles. Although not Viennese by birth, there is something about Welitsch which is typically Viennese, and that is probably why, as well as being at home in opera, she is just as successful in the Viennese operettas of Franz Lehár, like *Die lustige Witwe* and *Frasquita*.

RECORDINGS

It is greatly to be regretted that Welitsch has not recorded a complete *Salome*. Her interpretation of the closing scene is however available on Columbia 33CX 1011.

This suffers from a rather poor recording, and it is backed by Tatiana's "Letter Song" from *Eugene Onegin*. Perhaps her most outstanding single record is that with the two arias from *The Queen of Spades*, on Decca LW 5050 and London LO 9041, and with Amelia's two arias from *Un Ballo in Maschera* on the reverse.

